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NEW STATESMAN

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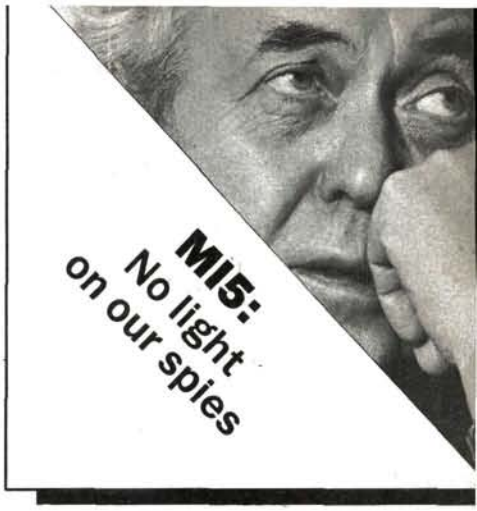
- The squeeze on the contras • The coming slump
- Politics of magic • Gay and lesbian writers



MI5: No light on our spies

100 REASONS FOR NOT VOTING TORY

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NEW STATESMAN

Vol 113 No 2929 15 May 1987

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NEXT WEEK

As the election proper begins, we publish a full length portrait of Neil Kinnock, the Labour leader; and furnish the best and fullest information on the tactical vote

The central reason

THIS SHOULD, and probably will be a more than usually thoughtful election. The contemplation of a third Conservative government should focus the mind considerably: there is, besides, no longer any distracting novelty in there being three parties strongly contesting for a majority of votes. Each of the three parties will present policies and styles which are sharply different in essential aspects.

Further, as Paul Ormerod writes (p15), any incoming government must prepare the country for the 1990s, when the oil revenues first decline steeply and when the country has to attempt to secure its living standards in some other way. It must make a series of fundamental choices on foreign policy: at root, a choice between further europeanisation or continued atlanticisation — or developing a relatively harmonious amalgam of the two. Above all, it must address the unprecedented (post-war) immiseration of millions who are without work and without adequate income.

To aid such thought, those on the left making the anti-government case must be precise. To accuse the government, or Mrs Thatcher, of every negative feature of the present, or of the past eight years, will fail because it will lack credibility. It is as necessary to be clear on what the Prime Minister has not been responsible for as on what she has.

She did not invent monetarism: indeed, her government has recently largely dispensed with it. James Callaghan and Denis Healey publicly buried the view that governments can spend to create full employment: their government, in the mid and late 1970s, first set in place the control of public expenditure and of the money supply. Roy Hattersley has repeatedly said he will do the same.

She did not cause the rapid appreciation of sterling soon after her first term of office began, which put such a squeeze on manufacturing industry and contributed so much to the unemployment totals: North Sea oil was the main cause of that. She did not cause the split in the Labour Party, did not arrange for Argentina to invade the Falklands and is not known to have stimulated opposition within Labour and the Alliance to their respective defence policies.

But of this central charge she does stand accused, and it is the largest consideration in all electoral calculations in the weeks ahead. She has presided over a rise in unemployment to levels somewhere between 3 and 4m (statistical fiddling makes much more precision difficult) and has not put in train any policies to deal with it. On the contrary: she has remained wedded to a strategy which has increased it, and which even now, with frantic padding of special programmes, will only keep it stable if we are very lucky.

This has divided our country, not so much on a north/south divide (though there is some truth in that) as on class lines. Those with higher educations — overwhelmingly the already privileged — have less than 1 in 20 chance of being unemployed. The unskilled have more than 1 in 7. Black people are twice as liable to be unemployed as white people. Northerners are twice as likely to be without work as southerners. The lowest paid fifth of the population (including the unemployed) have less than 7 per cent of the national income (nearly 8 per cent in 1979): the top fifth have nearly 40 per cent (under 38 per cent in 1979). A poor family with two children has seen its income grow by 2.6 per cent in real terms between 1979 and 1986. A rich one has seen a 21 per cent rise.

Such outcomes stretch the national fabric to ripping point. Such unambiguous signals to encourage private greed and to remain indifferent to public squalor and widespread misery are the greatest danger we face. The resolution and strength of will with which the Prime Minister has pursued inegalitarian ends has been unmatched in the Western world: it has reduced the liberties of the many whose opportunities are reduced the more the superfluous freedoms of extra wealth have been heaped on those who have.

Of course the operation has been conducted with great skill and flair. Certainly it has been assisted by a divided opposition and by inflated warrings within the opposition parties, especially the Labour Party. But it cannot go on: not for abstract political reasons, but because further movement towards a society as strained and fragmented as ours has become will soon reduce the freedoms of us all, as it crumbles and erupts.

Mrs Thatcher's central political achievement has been this: she has discovered how to hold, and even augment, political power on the top of a pedestal of misery. She has found that if the majority of the people are complacent enough or frightened enough, the minority can whinge (her words) till they drop.

There is now a chance to do more than whinge. It must be seized. If it means voting tactically — and it may well — then that should clearly be contemplated and followed through. Here in the *NS*, next week, we will publish the most up-to-date guide to how that might be done, in all the marginal constituencies where a Tory candidate can be unseated. We *must* have a government which can restore decent priorities to our public life. We must get this one out. □

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DIARY

Hong Kong

'I work all day and get half drunk at night': Larkin. Me too. In the latter half of just that situation I took aboard the first image of our new Governor. On the late news he seemed a dash crumpled in his uniform and (despite colour co-ordinated feathers to the cap) there's no denying that touch of the ship's purser about white linen and brass buttons. So who cares? He climbs real mountains (22,000 feet without oxygen) and speaks proper Mandarin which is more than I can say for most of the expatriates swilling about here — myself, of course, included.

○

Peaks to scale; mountains to move or mount or simply fall off: whatever, the new boss is going to find the path rocky and steep — uphill all the way. Certainly it was no coincidence that the *International Herald Tribune*, on the day of his arrival, published a front-page 'story' with the headline 'Hong Kong losing trust in British policy', the gist being how people are increasingly worried that the Colonial Government is hurrying through a range of repressive bills in order to — ah yes — what? Repress?

○

There are as many theories about the reasons for all this as there are theorists and you can choose, on the one hand, to believe that it's a conspiracy to prepare us for post-1997 Beijing rule; or, on the other, that it's simply another load of old cock-ups from a Legal Department which couldn't draft a . . . laundry bill if it tried. Who knows? Who cares? Well ponder this: under the recently passed Public Order (Amendment) Bill, anyone charged with spreading false news likely to cause public alarm must prove that they did not intend to do so maliciously — whatever that means — or it's the slammer. Which — presumed guilt before proven innocence — as was immediately pointed out, is not the British way. And never mind about minor matters relating to the freedom of the press. All enough to convince me that I should hope the *Herald Tribune* is right: people ought to be worried.

○

But how many *are* worried? The buzz concept in Hong Kong is 'Stability and Prosperity'; in other words, full retention of conditions necessary to preserve capitalist culture until 1997 and — more to the point — for 50 (a hundred even?) years thereafter. That's the bargain; and who's to argue for the alternative: 'Disorder and Poverty'? Thus the heavy Hong Kong money asserts that any *real* political change (e.g. one person, one vote) would be an intolerable threat to Stability. Moreover, it argues, inert Prosperity is exactly what Beijing wants, so there's the patriotic road to follow: yes, but even so, who collects the toll?

○

Deng's nightmare is obvious: frighten the capitalists and they'll take their money and run, leaving China with lots of worthless tall buildings and an empty harbour. No problem: let's ask the tycoons exactly how *they* want the place to work. And the answer is (right!): no reform (i.e. Stability) and we stay (i.e. Prosperity). Thereafter, at a suitably solemn moment, Deng receives these very same tycoons — now disguised as the disinterested drafters of the region's post-1997 Basic Laws — and firmly informs them that under no circumstances will Beijing tolerate any move towards Western democracy in Hong Kong. And so the abject capitalists return home to tell us what they told him to tell them. Do I hear laughter from the vaults?

○

Of course, I made all that up. So I'm paranoid. Nevertheless, political debate in Hong Kong is locked into a discourse set to prove the necessity of repression if 'Stability and Prosperity' are to be maintained. Of the latter — to prove the point — there's no lack. Travelling through the central New Territories — the once rural hinterland of urban Kowloon — is now a surreal experience: a new motorway cuts through a range of mountains and valleys not unlike some sub-tropical Highland scape with, wherever the eye swivels, seemingly at random, 40-floor tower-blocks littering the skyline. A gloom hangs over this vista as if — for no comprehensible reason — it was defenceless against the whims of a ludicrous god scattering irrelevant bits and pieces of central Manhattan about the Chinese countryside.

○

It occurred to me, passing through this scene, that perhaps in a hundred years or so this will indeed be Manhattan. For that is the historical end of Prosperity: the reverse take-over by capitalist Hong Kong of socialist China which will then be in thrall to the world's greatest megalopolis. There's everything here a tycoon could want: nuclear-powered energy; a highly sophisticated financial infrastructure; rich agricultural land along the Pearl River; a deep water harbour with a vast container terminal; a pool of immensely clever and ambitious workers ready to make the big time; and, of course, above it all, a Civil Service with an enviable history of running the whole show according to the minimum of necessary interference. How truly minimal, as right-wing propagandists would have you believe, I am not competent to judge: but it is worth remembering that Dr Sun Yat-sen became a revolutionary after coming from China to Hong Kong; for it is said that here he discovered the possibility of a society, free from corrupt or incompetent officials and rapacious war lords, administered according to the rule of law.

○

The rule of law: but whose rules and what law? For when some throat revealed that for the past 30 years the Government had illegally been banning and censoring films (mostly Taiwanese) they considered offensive to Beijing and further that it had known for the past 15 years of this illegality (they hadn't known before?) the Acting Governor swiftly responded to our alarm by promising (right!) to fix the double-dealing flake responsible for overturning these noxious beans. Good thinking, and it made me nostalgic for home now that spring is here.

Piers Gray

Piers Gray teaches English in Hong Kong.

ROGER WODDIS

The Lady gets my vote

(Acknowledgments to Lorenz Hart)

'The potentially unpopular feat the government must accomplish now is drawing the line between the deserving poor and the undeserving poor.' — Daily Telegraph

I've wined and dined on steak tartare,
And never on Kentucky.
I run the City from my car,
I guess I've just been lucky.
The dole-queue doesn't mean a thing,
My conscience has decayed;
It satisfies my simple soul
To know I've got it made.
Those dismal figures don't apply to me,
A Tory heaven is the place to be.

I'm never hungry, my wallet is thick,
I hate the homeless, they get on my wick,
I go to BUPA whenever I'm sick.
That's why the Lady gets my vote.

I don't like welfare that pampers the poor.
Why raise their pension? They'd only want more.
It's time they knighted the wolf at the door.
That's why the Lady gets my vote.

I like to give my friendship to crooks,
Fiddle the books,
Grab shares — who cares?
Don't mind who founders, as long as I float.
That's why the Lady gets my vote.

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The last witnesses

Paris

KLAUS BARBIE, 'a skilled worker' to the general of his SS division, Baron von Schade, 'the Butcher of Lyons' to the French, is now an elderly man of 73. His presence, back in Lyons where he held sway as SS Obersturmführer in the Gestapo from 1942 to 1944, is disquieting:

— For myself, who at that time was a Jewish child hidden in a village near Lyons. I was four in Barbie's peak period, and since then I have been mourning for my lost people.

— For those who did not escape Barbie but managed to survive, like Simone Lagrange who was 13 when Barbie tortured her for five days before sending her to Auschwitz. What had she done? Nothing. She was simply a Jew. What important information did he want her to reveal? Where her two younger brothers, aged nine and five were sheltered. Since then, Simone has dreamed every night of Auschwitz, of the hellish flames that reddened the sky night and day that no rain could quench. And above all, of the smell of burning flesh.

— For those who fought Barbie in the French Resistance movement and who can remember the sadism of the man who played romances on the piano to cover the cries of agony of his victims, who smiled when he himself punctured the lungs of his prisoners with long needles inserted between their ribs. He was probably also smiling when he tortured to death Jean Moulin, the leader of the underground movement, and de Gaulle's own representative in France.

For all his victims, Barbie is an ordeal to face again with aching wounds which can never heal. Others are also feeling uneasy, but for a different reason. They would prefer their dubious past to lie buried. The Resistance was indeed vivid in France, but so too was collaboration with the Nazis. Barbie himself was helped in his daily task by French torturers. While some were judged and executed in 1945, others were officially pardoned later and more of them lead peaceful lives now.

Prominent men in the Vichy government are today happy and prosperous. Men like Darquier de Pellepoix, who replaced the notorious Xavier Vallat in 1942 at the head of the 'Commission Generale des Questions Juives'. He worked with more than 1,000 others whose duties were to arrest and deport Jews to their death, sell their belongings and collect the money.

There has always been a fascist, racist strain in France. The defeat of France was not a blow for all: the Vichy government enacted most of the anti-semitic laws, and started hunting Jews, *before* it received orders from Germany. Today, Jean-Marie Le Pen sees the number of his supporters steadily growing. So the reason which compels numerous researchers to cast a shadow over the Resistance movement, suggesting that many of them were not only 'companions' of de Gaulle but 'fellows' of the Gestapo as well, that Jean Moulin had been denounced by his 'friends' and perhaps killed by them, is not necessarily a quest for the truth, but a way to reaffirm their ideology.

All this will help Jacques Verges, Barbie's lawyer, to build his client's defence. For him, Barbie is not guilty. 'Crimes of war', nearly half a century after the war took place, cannot be judged any longer according to French law. Wasn't Barbie simply a soldier, obeying orders, just as French soldiers in Algeria, US soldiers in Vietnam and Russian soldiers in Afghanistan have obeyed orders? Therefore, isn't the trial itself obsolete?

Barbie may have a special meaning for me, but I have no doubt that the ocean of tears which cannot dry, deep down in myself, is met worldwide by similar grief and for similar reasons. Barbies *do* exist everywhere: the Nazis created the structures enabling them to be effective performers, but the indifference of others helped them in their work.

Barbie hurried, in the very last months of the war, to deport as many Jews as he could, including the 44 children of an orphanage at Izieu. But didn't French policemen participate in the arrests of Jews? Didn't British officers refuse to bomb the rail tracks leading to Auschwitz-Birkenau? The indifference of the world towards the Jewish plight is certainly one of the most painful facts to absorb. But that so many were actively or passively guilty, can that be a reason not to judge Barbie?

For Elie Wiesel, the 1986 Nobel prizewinner who survived Buchenwald and who will be a witness on 2 June, this trial *is* necessary. For him, what happened during the Second World War is without any precedent. Not only the innocent were killed, but also 'the innocence of the world'. Jewish communities worldwide have always struggled hard, despite random accusations of paranoia or hysteria, to keep alive the memory of the six million men, women and children who were scientifically exterminated for what they were and not for what they did.

At a time when concentration camps are either turned into TV productions or the gas chambers simply denied by academics, when writers such as Celine or Brasillach, who did so much to stir up hatred towards the Jews, are now openly praised, it is certainly necessary to bring in the last witnesses of that period, before time blows the ashes away.

Yvette Marin

At the off

THE TORIES are heading for an 85 to 90-seat majority at the election, according to bookmakers Ladbroke. The odds against the Labour Party achieving the same majority are 1,000 to 1. Ladbroke think a Tory majority of between 73 and 102 most likely, with 85-90 as their middle guess, compared with Mrs Thatcher's 144-seat majority in 1983.

Our Tick-Tack Index, which measures the chances of each party being the largest party after the election, shows a further slide in Labour's rating.

Tick-Tack Index

	Mar 86	Jun 86	Sept 86	Dec 86	Mar 87	NOW
Con	49	43	49	57	68	82
Lab	41	49	44	40	29	14
Lib/SDP	10	8	7	3	3	4

The betting on the precise number of seats each party will win, however, shows Labour recovering slightly. IG Index's middle quotation for Labour has risen from 216 seats last month to 227 now; the Tories are down from 355 to 350 and the Liberal/SDP Alliance has fallen from 66 to 49. The rival City Index rates the Tories more highly, expecting them to win 365 seats, Labour 222 seats and the Alliance 45 seats.

John Rentoul

Grown-up unions, please note

STUDENTS in Britain enter the general election as Mr Kenneth Baker, the Education Secretary, promises to succeed against standard Tory targets — student unions, grants, a broad and accessible higher education system — where his predecessor,

the hapless Sir Keith Joseph, failed. The threat of a student loans scheme, with the attendant squeeze on working-class and minority student groups, is more real than ever. Baker is even preparing to tread where Joseph feared; the 'reform' of student unions themselves. A man with an eye on the main chance and the Tory conference standing ovation, Baker seems determined to take on NUS — currently a Labour students stronghold — as proof that he is just as capable of smashing socialism as anyone.

How are the National Union of Students and the National Organisation of Labour Students (the dominant political influence in its leadership) shaping up to the challenge? NUS has just launched a sophisticated and imaginitive campaign for marshalling its own section of the potentially bulging youth vote. They have targeted

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a number of 'student marginals'; key seats where the sitting MP's majority is less than the resident student population. Given the notoriously transient nature of students, NUS has worked long and hard to hone down its information, achieving a precision which is being greatly admired by 'grown up' unions. No overnight idea, the planning and pinpointing started 18 months ago.

The NUS campaign, hinged around the slogan 'Don't Vote in Ignorance', is backed by a voter registration drive and the publication of a booklet highlighting the education issues on which the government's education record is seen as weak. Candidates have already been circulated with a questionnaire to determine attitudes to youth, education and training. Their answers will be used to mobilise the potential strength of the student vote in target seats.

The response of the Trotskyite left has been to dismiss complex targeting and call for NUS simply to adopt a 'Vote Labour' slogan. That is shared by Militant and Socialist Organiser, the two far left groups currently wrestling for control of NOLS. That call, inadmissible under the NUS constitution, allows them to be both inactive during the campaign and critical afterwards.

Will NUS add its voice to those calling for tactical voting? 'To co-ordinate a national system of tactical voting would be beyond the scope of our organisation' says NUS president Vicky Phillips. 'We are making students and young people aware of their potential for influence in a way that they never have been before, and we are urging them to vote for the candidate with their interests at heart. In some seats that may be the Liberal. In most it will be Labour.'

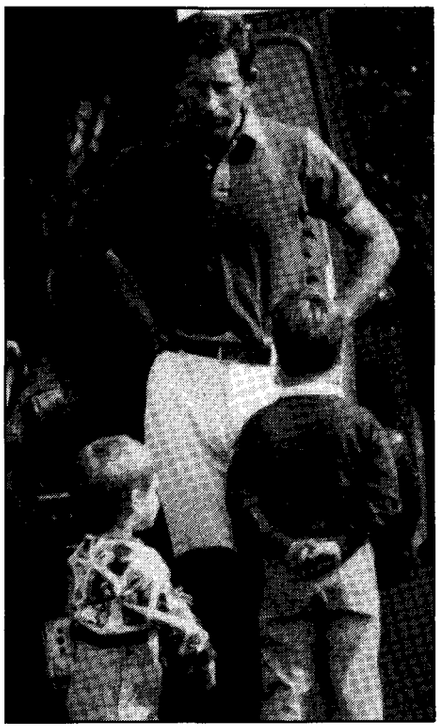
Given Kenneth Baker's stated intention to turn on student unions, Phillips is well aware of the narrow line that must be walked in order not to alienate permanently those Tory MPs who have supported NUS against the 'smash student unions' lobby on the hard right. But aren't the implications of this campaign clearly anti-Tory and the danger of antagonism just the same?

'Nothing we are saying to students during the election campaign will be any different from what we have always said about this government's policies' says Vicky Phillips. 'The prospects of a third term of Thatcher for young people and students is so bleak and appalling that we would be totally wrong to miss out on the opportunity to put the student case across as effectively and forcefully as possible.'

Colin Byrne

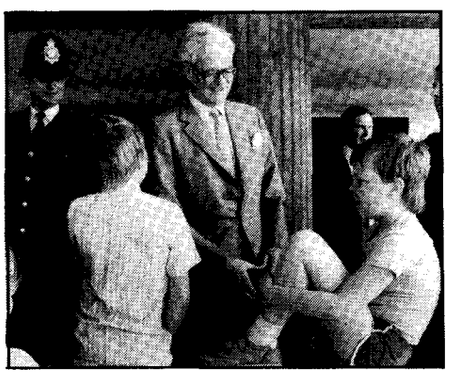
If the caption fits

No 17



What might the great community architect of our time be saying to the two little community architects? Entries to reach this office, where a £10 book token awaits, by Monday 25 May. By which time the election will be only two weeks away.

No 15: winner



Boy, right, to Home Sec Douglas Hurd: 'Yeah, it was Sir Maurice Oldfield himself who recruited me to MI6.' (*Tony Brazendale, Rochdale.*) Hon mensh for: 'Now, give those neighbourhood watch signs back to the nice police officer or I'll chop off your other leg.' (*Phil Scraton, Burscough, Lancs.*)

Saudi despatch — *stop press*

AFTER seven months, the legal saga surrounding the Saudi despatch is at last over.

Last October the *NS* attempted to publish the text of Sir James Craig's valedictory despatch as Ambassador to Saudi Arabia. The Attorney General stepped in with a restraining injunction. We contested the injunction in the courts, but lost. The *Glasgow Herald*, however, published Sir James's comments in its morning edition — while the government's request for an injunction was still being considered in a Judge's chambers.

Piqued by their failure, the government initiated a mole hunt. Last week the Department of the Director of Public Prosecutions informed Brian Raymond, solicitor to *NS* journalist Patrick Forbes, that the DPP was proceeding no further against Patrick Forbes in this matter. ●

NEWSTATESPERSONS

Hot and cool in Labour's service

THAT LABOUR will run a better campaign than the shambles of 1983 is seen as one of the few certainties of the pre-campaign period, and one of the main causes for optimism in the Labour camp that it can claw back the Tory lead. That this should be so is due very largely to two youngish people who have downwardly mobilised themselves out of the Porsche class, to which their birth or talents or both had fitted them.

Patricia Hewitt, 38, and Peter Mandelson, 33, are respectively the leader's press secretary and the party's director of campaigns and communications. *She* is Australian mandarin class; *he* has an impeccable Labour pedigree. He was a Lambeth councillor, worked for the TUC after Oxford University and was chairman of the British Youth Council before joining London Weekend TV on *Weekend World*. She took a degree at Cambridge, then worked briefly for Age Concern before settling in to a ten-year stint at the National Council for Civil Liberties, most of that as general secretary.

They contrast sharply: she is intense, quick to smile and to flare, both impulsively abrasive and impulsively diplomatic at once: he is hugely cool, seeming to inhabit a space comfortably removed from the fray while being in the thick of it.

He has won praise for his endeavours, she has tended to get the stick. She is much more exposed than he, with a record of activism on the party's left and a candidacy (in 1983) in Leicester East. Much of the fierce criticism directed at her over the 'Hewitt letter' after the Greenwich by-election (in which she identified specifically gay politics as a problem) was because she was seen as ditching previous stances. Mandelson, by contrast, has not been troubled by reminders of a low-profile occupancy of a position on the party's right.

He has also had an easier task in bringing into the party a public relations flair which had been largely absent before 1985, when he was appointed. The rose symbol, the cool colours for conference backdrops, the sharper campaign-styles, the mobilisation of Labour sympathisers in the media to assist the party was all hard work but had the backing of a new general secretary (Larry Whitty) and a pro-Kinnock executive.

For her part, she has had to contain, over the past year, the damage inflicted on her leader by a press corps of which a significant part was in for the kill. He operates largely within the party, where Kinnock's insistence more or less runs that it be geared to win: she has to project Kinnock out to the world beyond.

Projecting the Labour Party, as the scars on such veterans as Joe Haines (Harold Wilson) and Sir Tom McCaffrey (James Callaghan) testify, is a savagely difficult job. The new, open style initially favoured by Hewitt and Mandelson has taken some hard knocks from the old stilettos of Fleet Street and beyond. This election is the largest test of their stamina and nerve, as well as the inherent marketability of their clients. ●

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PETER KELLNER

How the Alliance can shatter Thatcher's and Kinnock's dreams

IN 1983 the Conservatives won their landslide victory with the lowest share of support of any party winning a clear working majority since 1918. It is possible, to put it no higher, that they will win again next month with an even lower share. Opinion polls and local election results both confirm that the Tories start from a slightly lower base than last time. But so does Labour.

Only the Liberal/SDP Alliance begins its campaign ahead of where it started four years ago. If it increases its share this time as much as it did then, it could well reach 30 per cent on election day and — depending where it takes its votes from — overtake Labour in votes cast (though not seats won).

The Alliance's potential to screw up the plans of both main parties cannot be overestimated. Britain's electoral system combines with the Alliance's role as most people's second choice to provoke nightmares in all but the most optimistic Tory strategists. The danger is not that we shall have an Alliance government (not this time, anyway) but that it poses clear threats to both Mrs Thatcher and Mr Kinnock.

THE THREAT to the Conservatives is that a strong Alliance campaign could rob Mrs Thatcher of her majority. That statement must immediately be qualified: the Alliance won't do that on their own; they also need Labour to win some dozens of seats. For the Alliance to win 70 seats from the Tories without Labour winning any, Alliance candidates must win every seat where the Tories won by 20 per cent or less over second-place Alliance candidates last time. Governments are routinely embarrassed by such swings at by-elections; they are seldom humiliated so brutally at general elections.

What is feasible is that Labour, the Alliance and the nationalists could between them win the 70 seats that could cost the Prime Minister her majority. In essence, the Alliance's role would be to help Labour do what the people's party may be unable to do on its own. A 5 per cent Tory-Alliance swing could yield the Alliance 20 extra seats. Tactical voting could increase this to 30.

This would be worrying for the Tories whether or not they lose their overall majority this time. The immediate nightmare, of course, is that the Conservatives would fail to be re-elected this time. But there is a longer-term problem. In 1983 the Alliance came second in two-thirds of the Tories' 397 seats. But in most cases the winning MP's majority was more than 20 points.

A significant Tory-Alliance swing might topple only 20-30 seats; but it would bring the Alliance within sight of victory in a hundred others. A narrow Conservative victory this time could presage a Tory humiliation in 1991. An electoral system that has sustained Mrs Thatcher in office on diminishing minority support would be the engine which eventually propels the Tories from power.

What the Tories want most of all is a re-run of 1983: a divided anti-Tory vote, in which the Alliance does well enough at Labour's expense to give Mrs Thatcher a large majority, but not so well that Liberal and SDP candidates close the gap on sitting Conservative MPs. If the Tories win 40 per cent of the vote on polling day, then they need the Alliance to win 23-27 per cent. Any less, and Labour would give the Tories a fright; any more and dozens of shire Tories would face extinction in four years' time.

LABOUR'S NIGHTMARE is, in some ways, the same as the Tories'. It needs the Alliance to do well, but not too well. And if things go wrong, Labour will face not just the pain of a further spell in opposition, but the terminal agony of a protracted death.

For the moment let us look on the bright side. Suppose Labour recovers all the ground during the next four weeks that it has lost in the past seven months. Given that performance, unprecedented in any modern general election campaign, Labour would end up with 40 per cent. To win a clear majority on those figures, the Tories must be pushed down to 34 per cent or less. Assuming 2 per cent support for nationalist and other candidates, the harsh laws of simple arithmetic show that the Alliance must score at least 24 per cent.

> ***'Labour's nightmare is the same as the Tories'. It needs the Alliance to do well, but not too well'***

Nor does that calculation change if we consider the more modest ambition of Labour forming a minority government. This might be possible with Labour on 36 per cent and the Tories on 38. (The Conservatives would win more seats, but almost certainly too few to govern. Neil Kinnock would have his chance to become Prime Minister, and begin a sprint towards a second election.) But once again, the Alliance must win at least 24 per cent.

Before readers start sending me computer print-outs providing whacky figures in green ink, I immediately concede that Labour could enter power as a minority government with 40 per cent support and the Alliance below 20 per cent. This does not alter my main point. If Labour does win 40 per cent, then the better the Alliance does, *within limits*, the better Labour's chances of winning outright. If Labour wins 36 points, then it is absolutely vital for the Alliance to reach at least the mid-20s for Labour to sniff power at all.

So should Labour wish the Alliance well during the present campaign? As with the Conservatives, Labour's ideal figure for the Alliance is somewhere in the mid-20s: any less, and Labour can kiss goodbye to power now; much more and it can kiss goodbye to power forever.

It's not quite as simple as that, of course; nothing in politics ever is. In theory, a perfect result for Labour would be Labour 40 per cent, Alliance 30, Conservative 28, others 2. But anyone who predicts that outcome would be well advised not to seek a career as a clairvoyant.

Having explored the outer reaches of optimism, let us look at a more pessimistic prospect: the Alliance picks up support during the campaign, while Labour slips back. It is almost inconceivable that the Alliance could win more seats than Labour. Let's suppose that Labour, starting the campaign with 32 per cent support, drops to 22 per cent. Let us also suppose that the Tories win 40 per cent and the Alliance climbs to 36. On a uniform swing, those figures would produce 367 Conservative MPs, 172 Labour and 88 Alliance. Labour would win four million fewer votes than the Alliance but still have twice as many MPs.

Parliamentary etiquette ignores popular votes. The leader of the opposition is the leader of the party with the next largest number of seats after the government. Neil Kinnock would still be able to claim his place at the despatch box. He would keep his car, his salary and his right to toss three questions twice a week at the Prime Minister.

But to the outside world — to the electorate that had cast 10.8 million votes for Liberal and SDP candidates but only 6.6 million for Labour — it would be a monstrous negation of democracy to put Labour ahead of the Alliance in the parliamentary pecking order.

A less extreme outcome could also create a crisis of legitimacy for Labour. If the result were Conservatives 40 per cent, Alliance 30, Labour 28, Labour would have six times as many MPs as the Alliance. Labour would gain a handful of seats from the Tories, but it would no longer look like a party capable of subsequently challenging for power.

It is in the light of calculations like these that tactical voting poses a peculiar conundrum for Labour. Of course it is necessary for the party to disown it; no member of the shadow cabinet could ask Labour supporters to vote for anyone other than the local candidate. Privately, however, many party officials hope that the Alliance will take seats from the Tories, and so make it easier to unhorse Mrs Thatcher.

If things go moderately well, a small dose of tactical voting would do Labour good. If Labour wins, say, 270 seats (and assuming nationalists and Ulster MPs total 25), then it would be better for the party if the remaining 355 places at Westminster divide Conservative 300, Alliance 55, rather than Conservative 330, Alliance 25.

The danger for Labour in tactical voting is that it could backfire catastrophically. Its effect might be to reduce but not eliminate the Tories' majority — and hence have no impact on who governs — while causing the Alliance to overtake Labour in the nationwide popular vote. Labour supporters in Tory-Alliance marginals will need to weigh up the hope that widespread tactical voting could deprive the Tories of power against the fear that it could deprive Labour of future credibility. □

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One hundred reasons for not voting TORY

You will be battered, in the coming weeks, with a dominant view that the Conservatives are the* only *possible government for this country and that the success of their policies is now evident.* JOHN RENTOUL, *with the aid of* Laura Berryman *and* Harriett Gilbert, *has compiled 100 reasons why that isn't so.* Colin Wheeler *drew the pictures

Fair shares

1. 'The rich have become richer and the poor have become poorer; and the vessel of state is driven between the Scylla and Charybdis of anarchy and despotism,' as Shelley put it, more or less rightly. The disposable income of the richest tenth of the population has increased from six-and-a-half times that of the poorest tenth in 1979 to eight times.

2. The wealth of the richest 2 per cent of the population, 860,000 individuals, has increased by £60,000 per head since 1979, taking inflation into account. That's an average of £320,000 each — £640,000 per married couple. The average wealth of the rest of the population increased by £2,900 in real terms to £17,600 per head.

3. The number of people — a quarter of them children — living at or below the level of Supplementary Benefit, has doubled from 6 million in 1979 to 12 million in 1986.

4. The Chancellor's policy is of Keynesianism for one nation and monetarism for the other. For one nation: tax cuts, easy credit and government spending on their mortgage interest and company cars. For the other: cash limits, cuts in public services and government action to reduce the wages of the already low-paid (see no 20).

5. British aid to the Third World, 0.34 per cent of national income, is less than half the UN target of 0.7 per cent.

6. State pensions have fallen behind the rise in average incomes. This from the party that has 'repeatedly committed ourselves to ensure that pensioners share in rising prosperity'.

7. Home owners have been pampered, while council housing budgets have been slashed. Raising the mortgage eligible for tax relief to £30,000 in 1983 is worth £3 a week to ordinary taxpayers, and £6.50 a week to top-rate taxpayers.

8. Tax cuts have been for the rich. Labour's 98 per cent tax rate on unearned income wasn't a particularly bright idea. Its main effect was to create jobs for accountants. But every single change *to the tax system since 1979 has benefited the rich more than the poor, except for one feeble measure: the abolition of new tax relief for life assurance.*

9. 'I feel that we owe quite a debt to the people in the bottom half. We have taken in my view too high a proportion of their income in tax.' — Mrs Thatcher, *Panorama*, 17 February 1986.

5

10. The literally medieval poll tax, protested by Wat Tyler in 1381, and for 605 years regarded as a grossly unfair principle of taxation, is now to be inflicted on the Scots in 1989 and on other voters thereafter.

Jobs

11. Unemployment, counted on a consistent basis by researchers at the Unemployment Unit, nearly tripled from 1.25 million in 1979 to over 3.6 million at the beginning of this year. If unemployment had only gone up by as much as the average of other main industrial economies, 1.5 million people would now have jobs who instead sit at home watching Robert Kilroy-Silk.

12. 'If unemployment is not below 3 million in five years,' Norman Tebbit denies saying in May 1983, 'then I am not worth re-electing.' Counted by the method in force then, unemployment is unlikely to fall below 3 million next year — let alone by the general election — unless a Labour government is elected. At the present rate, it will take another eight years for unemployment to fall to the same level as when the Tories came to power eight years ago.

13. Jeffrey Archer: 'I was unemployed with debts of £400,000. I know what unemployment is like and a lot of it is getting off your backside and finding a job.' Or writing lousy novels. Get on yer word processors.

14. Norman Tebbit: 'Some people find life in the safety net a little too comfortable.' Supplementary Benefit, which is what the 1.5 million long-term unemployed subsist on, is £1,581 a year for single people, excluding housing costs.

15. Unemployed men are 11 times more likely than those in work to attempt suicide, and 19 times more likely if they are unemployed for over a year, according to a study in Edinburgh between 1978 and 1982.

16. Over a third of men aged 55-59 and over half of men aged 60-64 don't have a job. The DHSS doesn't want them to retire, and the Department of Employment doesn't want them on the unemployment register. They are a forgotten 'generation in limbo'.

17. There were marches against unemployment in London exactly 100 years ago. This month thousands demonstrated by joining Hands Across Britain. Has so little changed?

18. Manufacturing output is still below the level of 1979.

19. 'Where there is despair, may we bring hope' — Mrs Thatcher, May 1979. 'Frighteningly bleak', 'little prospect of improvement', 'few indications of recovery' — government report to the European Commission on hopes for jobs in the North West, West Midlands and North East, 1986.

20. The New Workers Scheme. It's a £15-a-week subsidy to the employer *of 18 and 19-year-olds taken on at £55 a week or less (£2,860 a year) or of 20-year-olds taken on at £65 a week or less.*

Peace

21. Mrs Thatcher is convinced that her own and Ronald Reagan's obduracy has brought the Russians to the negotiating table. She is thus ill-placed to take advantage of a rapidly-changing Soviet foreign policy — and to underpin the reformism of a still-fragile Mikhail Gorbachev.

22. 'Our policy is the zero option,' Mrs Thatcher told parliament on 23 December 1982. When Mikhail Gorbachev offered it, she dissembled: 'Nuclear weapons cannot be dealt with in isolation, given the need for a stable overall balance,' she said on 18 November 1986.

23. The American raid on Libya, intended to kill Colonel Gadafy in contravention of US law

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forbidding assassinations, was launched from Britain with Mrs Thatcher's permission.

24. The sinking of the Argentine cruiser General Belgrano *in 1982 with the loss of 368 lives. Desmond Rice and Arthur Gavshon, in their careful book on the sinking, conclude that British forces 'were not at risk from the* Belgrano, *chugging homewards at less than 13 knots, and trailed by a submarine which could catch and sink her wherever she went'.*

25. Mrs Thatcher's refusal to talk to Argentina about the Falklands is damaging the long-term stability of Argentinian democracy and is hugely expensive for the British taxpayer, still shelling out £143,000 per islander per year.

26. The government supports the US plan to make new two-part (binary) chemical weapons for deployment in Europe. There was no debate in parliament, and Mrs Thatcher is the only European leader who will consider having the weapons on their territory if the US asks.

27. Mrs Thatcher gives every appearance of positively *wanting* nuclear weapons even if every other country in the world dismantled theirs.

28. Geoffrey Howe represents you abroad.

29. Mrs Thatcher has wasted what status Britain has in the world. Her 'special relationship' with Ronald Reagan has consisted of forelock-tugging over UNESCO, Grenada, nuclear weapons and loans to Nicaragua. In the Commonwealth, the European Community and the forums of industrialised nations she has failed to give moral and political leadership on such issues as sanctions against South Africa, Third World development and economic co-ordination.

30. London is still the centre of the global arms trade. Not to mention official sales to the Chilean dictatorship.

Conscience

31. 'No one with a conscience votes Conservative.' Source: *sub judice.*

32. Even if *some of the greater inequality suffered and enjoyed by different parts of the country since 1979 is not directly attributable to Mrs Thatcher's government (and much of it is), her language is one of unforgiveness, competition and of private individuals who would steal from the next-door neighbours if they thought they could get away with it.*

33. Keith Best MP in his various guises, who made six applications for British Telecom shares. It's bad enough for an MP to profit from a policy he legislated in, but to try to profit six times as much as everyone else is gross. Then having the gall to say he didn't think he was doing anything wrong and so wouldn't resign immediately (but had done *something* wrong and so would resign at the election) adds slipperiness to greed.

34. Michael Cockeram MP, and all the others not to be prosecuted for simply being over-enthusiastic in their pursuit of Thatcherite virtues. He only made two applications for British Telecom shares (and two for British Gas), one 'for some of my grandchildren', whose parents' signature was required but not obtained.

35. Nor have there been many prosecutions of doctors found to be using NHS facilities for private practice and not paying or underpaying to such an extent that Whitehall's auditor refused to sign the NHS accounts for 1983/84.

36. Mrs Thatcher has voted for hanging on each of the five occasions the question has been put to the House of Commons since 1979.

37. There's more to life than 2p off income tax.

38. Nigel Lawson used his position as Chief Secretary to the Treasury in 1980 to call in senior civil servants because he wanted his personal tax bill reduced (correctly, as it turned out).

39. Mrs Thatcher's version of the parable of the Good Samaritan was that the important thing about him was that he had money.

40. Mark Thatcher. First Mum 'batted' for a company called Cementation, for which he was a consultant, to get a contract in Oman. Then there was the House of Fraser question, still unanswered; did he fly to Brunei with Mohammed Fayed, possible front person for the Sultan in the successful takeover of Harrods?

Education

41. The state of schools. Three-quarters of them are in 'less than satisfactory or poor' condition according to Her Majesty's Inspectors in 1986.

42. The taxpayer subsidises private education, for

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just 6.6 per cent of schoolchildren, by £600 million a year — an annual handout of over £1,000 per child. The half-billion is made up of the Assisted Places Scheme, £49 million; state training of teachers, £350 million; charitable status, £60 million; local council purchased places (for non-handicapped pupils), £80 million; armed forces and diplomatic service purchased places £100 million.

43. None of the Cabinet uses state schools.

44. Schools in middle-class districts are kept going by parental contributions, for books and equipment, on a scale that now amounts to partial privatisation.

45. Teachers' rights to negotiate over their pay and conditions have been taken away.

46. Education spending took 14.4 per cent of national income in 1979, when defence took 11.4 per cent. By 1985/86, education's share had fallen to 13.1 per cent, overtaken by defence spending at 13.6 per cent.

47. Three- and four-year-olds. In Belgium and France nine out of ten go to nursery school. In Britain four out of ten do.

48. The government is ambivalent about comprehensive education, ensuring that children get the worst of both worlds: an expanding private sector, remnants of selection, comprehensives in middle-class areas trying to be like private schools, and now city technical colleges — all separating off privilege without providing for the unprivileged.

49. The Job Training Scheme. If the Tories are re-elected, young people will do it or get no benefit.

50. 'We've found out that a quarter of the long-term unemployed are illiterate' — Lord Young, unelected Employment Minister, 3 May 1987. Even if it were *true (the MSC report referred to people who have 'literacy or numeracy problems that might affect their opportunities of securing employment'), it is pathetic to blame the unemployed for dole queues.*

Quality of life

51. Fear of crime is rising, for good reason. Thefts increased by a third between 1979 and 1985, burglaries by 59 per cent, vandalism and criminal damage by 91 per cent. And not just since 1979: since the war, the rate of increase in crime has been twice as much under Conservative governments as under Labour.

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52. Health service cuts. Since the 1983 election, spending on hospital services has fallen behind the rising needs of an aging population; it therefore also misses the government's own target of spending 0.5 per cent a year extra in real terms on new medical techniques — plus another 0.5 per cent a year on developing services like kidney treatment and community care. The last Labour government's system for levelling up NHS provision has been corrupted into a levelling-down system to the national average, producing deep cuts year after year in the South East. When Mrs Thatcher claims 'we are spending 24 per cent a year more in real terms on the NHS', this is accounted for mainly by (a) the 14 per cent Clegg pay award in 1980, left over from Labour, and (b) out-of-control spending on drugs prescribed by GPs.

53. Pay-as-you-enter buses.

54. Social Services Secretary Norman Fowler has nobbled the improved state pension (SERPS), driving the fortunate to personal pensions and the unfortunate to fear old age.

55. Riots in St Paul's, Bristol (1980), Brixton (1981, 1985), Toxteth, Liverpool (1981), Handsworth, Birmingham (1981, 1985), Tottenham (1985).

56. Shabbiness so striking that the Prime Minister herself, returning to Heathrow, was moved to appoint Virgin boss Richard Branson national litter supremo. Street cleaning is what local councils used to do. We have yet to notice a Branson effect.

57. The government has been slow and cheapskate in setting up screening for cervical cancer, which causes the avoidable death of 2,000 women a year.

58. The government has obstructed international attempts to reduce acid rain and to preserve the ozone layer.

59. Personal stereos tinkling and digital watches bleeping in public places. Which may not be the Conservative Party's fault as such, but seems to fit in with promoting a nation of self-reliant private individuals, trying to insulate themselves from the harshness of the real world and other people.

60. The Conservative Party is one of the few political parties in the world — the other main ones being in France, Belgium and the USSR — that have tossed Chernobyl aside and are committed to a big expansion in nuclear power.

Civil liberty

61. 'People are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture. People are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in.' — Mrs Thatcher, 30 January 1978.

62. The Conservatives are the only party that opposes a Scottish Assembly.

63. The prosecution of Sarah Tisdall, who exposed Defence Minister Michael Heseltine's attempt to mislead the country about the arrival of cruise missiles.

64. The prosecution of Clive Ponting, who exposed untruths about the sinking of the Belgrano *(see no 24) lodged in the parliamentary record by Tory ministers, including the Prime Minister.*

65. Trade union rights have been taken away at GCHQ on grounds of national security. The controversy advertised the spy centre's existence and role more widely than any number of articles by Duncan Campbell.

66. Norman Tebbit's attempt to intimidate the BBC.

67. The cynical use of prejudice against homosexuals — particularly cynical at a time of widespread fear of Aids — by government ministers. For example, Rhodes Boyson on BBC *Newsnight*, 15 April 1987, who, interviewed about Labour, Alliance and Tory councils' use of deferred purchase schemes, pointed out that 'these are the councils who are spending money on the lesbians and gays . . .'

68. Not only did the government start work on the Zircon spy satellite project without telling parliament, in breach of the so-called Chevaline agreement, but its secret police raided the offices of the magazine which disclosed this deception and the homes of three of its journalists.

69. 'I wouldn't imprison homosexuals *as such*, no.' — Norman Tebbit, *Spectator*, 24 May 1986.

70. The government has failed to tackle endemic job discrimination against black people. One in three applications by non-whites for private-sector jobs is rejected even before being read through, according to the Policy Studies Institute — no better than in 1973. Indeed, the government has obstructed the efforts of Labour local councils to check that their contractors and suppliers comply with national laws including the Race Relations Act.

Democracy

71. It's the other lot's turn.

72. The abolition of the Greater London Council. Ken Livingstone: 'If you want me out, vote me out.'

73. Company shareholders don't have to be balloted on whether to set up a political fund to make donations to political parties, as the trade unions were forced to do in 1985/86. The reason being that Tory companies couldn't hope to obtain the average 83 per cent 'yes' vote on high turnouts that Labour-affiliated unions did.

74. The unfair electoral system.

75. The government's hostility to pluralism, political, moral and cultural; its ambition to extirpate socialism. This deeply anti-democratic strain in Conservatism is articulated weekly by Peregrine Worsthorne in the *Sunday Telegraph*. For example: 'The best way to prevent the secret services flexing their muscles is to make sure that this country is never again as misgoverned as it was under Harold Wilson' (3 May 1987).

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76. It was expressed more nakedly by Worsthorne's friend Maurice Cowling, the Cambridge historian, in 1978: 'The Conservative Party exists now, as at any other time since 1886, because those who acquire the benefits connected with inequality . . . judge it better if possible to get part of what they want by acting effectively through a parliamentary system. They accept that a balancing of costs is involved and that, if the price that is paid is too high, there will be those who will want parliamentary arrangements superseded.' (Conservative Essays, p11).

77. The Westland Affair. Mrs Thatcher first used prime ministerial power to sneak her preferred (American) solution through Cabinet committee, and then persuaded the Solicitor General to write a letter which she could — indirectly — leak to the press to try to discredit her Defence Minister.

78. Norman Tebbit's claim that the participation of non-ratepayers distorts local election results. The Conservative solution is next year's one-fifth rates bill for millions already living at a level on which the then Tory MP Matthew Parris could barely survive for a fortnight.

79. To prove the opinion polls wrong.

80. Mrs Thatcher's refusal to hold an inquiry into alleged MI5 subversion of Harold Wilson. As Sir James Callaghan told her: 'It is all very well for you to be convinced about these matters. It may be all very well for me to be convinced. But it is important that the public should have confidence. There is a direct conflict of evidence between what Peter Wright says and what I was told by the Director General of the Security Service in 1977. Who do I believe?'

Art

81. Churchill's collapsed; Howarth's collapsed; but a third Tory term will surely produce a third Obscene Publications Bill which, if enacted, would make it illegal grossly to offend Mary Whitehouse.

82. The steady erosion of state support for minority and/or experimental art: since 1979 there has been a cut of 3.1 per cent in the real value of the Arts Council's grant.

83. The steady encouragement of private support for safe and/or prestigious events: the Tate's magnificent exhibition of (pacifist) Oskar Kokoschka's paintings was sponsored by the arms manufacturer United Technologies Corporation.

84. Denis Thatcher doesn't write poems.

85. 'It seems to me a barren thing this Conservatism — an unhappy cross-breed, the mule of politics that engenders nothing' — Benjamin Disraeli, novelist.

86. Estates of neo-georgian town houses (complete with classical security cameras).

87. Museum charges.

88. VAT on books.

89. Voting Conservative encourages the Saatchis; the Saatchis encourage Julian Schnabel.

90. 'The appeal can always be made to the basic animal drive for comfort and survival of the biological unit — "myself, my genes and, therefore, my family." But it's not something which is particularly human. In being human we try to build on something which is of secondary evolutionary use, which is some form of altruism.' — Maureen Duffy, New Statesman, *17 April 1987.*

Common sense

91. Subsidy for public transport in Britain is lower than most industrialised countries, yet company cars are subsidised to the tune of £1.7 billion a year.

92. Allowing doctors to work for the NHS and *for private patients gives them an incentive to be inefficient: if their waiting lists are longer, patients are more likely to pay for the same treatment. And how can the NHS be safe in her privately-treated hands?*

93. The tax burden has risen under the Conservatives. When Mrs Thatcher took office taxes (adding together income tax, National Insurance, VAT, duties, rates and so on) took 38 per cent of Britain's national income. By 1982 that figure had shot up to over 46 per cent. It was at last brought down by Nigel Lawson's 'tax-cutting' Budget in March this year to just under 45 per cent.

94. Fatal and serious accidents in manufacturing industry are up 28 per cent since 1981, and up 42 per cent in the construction industry. Health and Safety Executive inspectors have been cut from 1,424 to 1,204.

95. 'I do not believe that services should be free' — Edwina Currie, junior health minister, July 1986. Britain's NHS, free to everyone when they need it, is the most efficient in the world. Americans and West Germans spend nearly twice as much (as a proportion of their higher national incomes) on health care, and are less healthy.

96. 'The full magnitude of Britain's decline has been concealed by one thing only: North Sea oil. Here was the windfall of the century. It should have been husbanded and deployed in long-term investment, to break out of the spiral of low productivity and low wages. Instead it has been treated like a win on the Pools. The government has used it to hide the collapse of our industrial performance.' — Mrs Thatcher, Leader of the Opposition, 16 April 1979.

97. The crime clear-up rate is now so low that it costs £7,000 to clear up each crime. It would be cheaper to abolish bureaucracy and the middleperson, and make direct grants to criminals.

98. All Tory candidates these days seem to be (as in the Greenwich by-election) merchant bankers who are like penguins on amphetamines.

99. Tory John Carlisle, self-described as 'an enthusiastic MP who unashamedly uses his privileged position' to queue-jump (at Buckingham Palace garden parties, Wimbledon, etc.).

100. 'We've never had it so good for the 87 per cent of us who are working' — Employment Minister Lord Young, May 1986. □

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It *is* wide open

The local election results have been widely misinterpreted: they were not the green light the Tories said they were. Analysis by

JOHN CURTICE, CLIVE PAYNE *and* ROBERT WALLER

MRS THATCHER'S decision to call the election for 11 June means three of the last six general elections will have been called after the annual spring round of local elections. The precedents are mixed. While at the last election the Conservatives won a handsome majority of 144 and improved upon their local election performance the previous month, in 1970 Harold Wilson met unexpected defeat after being induced to go to the country nine months early by favourable local polls.

This year's results were *not* — contrary to most comment — outstanding for the Conservatives. Over the country as a whole their vote was about 2 per cent lower than in the May 1983 local elections. This fact was rather obscured by their net gain of 75 seats. But if we break down the pattern of Conservative gains and losses by party, the weaker Conservative position is clear. Its cache of net gains from Labour was little more than half its losses to the Alliance. It was only net gains from Others and Independents, who continued their long-term decline in local government, which produced an overall positive picture for the Conservatives.

Table 1: Conservative gains and losses

To/From	Gains	Losses	Net change
Lab	213	102	+111
Alliance	170	371	−201
Independent	178	50	+128
Others	37	10	+ 27

The Alliance was the party that made the most apparent progress on the night. Indeed, it is clear that they enter the general election in a stronger position than they did the 1983 election campaign, with 27 per cent of the national vote. But this performance was equally not an exceptional one — it was the same result as they achieved in the local elections in May 1985 and May 1986.

How, then, is it that we enter a general election in which the Conservatives start as clear favourites to win, while some speculate about the possibility that the Alliance succeed in becoming the second party in terms of votes if not in seats? Because the one unambiguous message from the results was a drubbing for Labour. After having polled in a manner consistent with a national vote of 37-38 per cent in all of the local election rounds of this parliament, and being on each occasion at least narrowly ahead of the Conservatives, their support fell back to little more than the 30 per cent mark.

It is Labour's failure that gives Mrs Thatcher the possibility of a third term. It has opened up for the government the kind of large lead they need to be able to win an election on as little as 40 per cent of the vote. After having been sufficiently strong in the opinion polls, at least to deny the Conservatives an overall majority if not to win one themselves for most of the period since Neil Kinnock's election as leader, Labour's support has crumbled at the most critical time.

The result of the election is not, however, a foregone conclusion. Taking into account both last Thursday's results and the rather less rosy prospects for the Conservatives indicated by the opinion polls in Scotland, the Conservatives would probably have won a 7 May election with a majority of no more than about 30. Such a position is not invulnerable in the face of a volatile electorate. Equally, it is quite close to the situation where the Conservatives' retention of an overall majority would depend on the geographical distribution of the vote. What are the portents of the local elections so far as possible differences in the movement of the vote from one kind of seat to another are concerned?

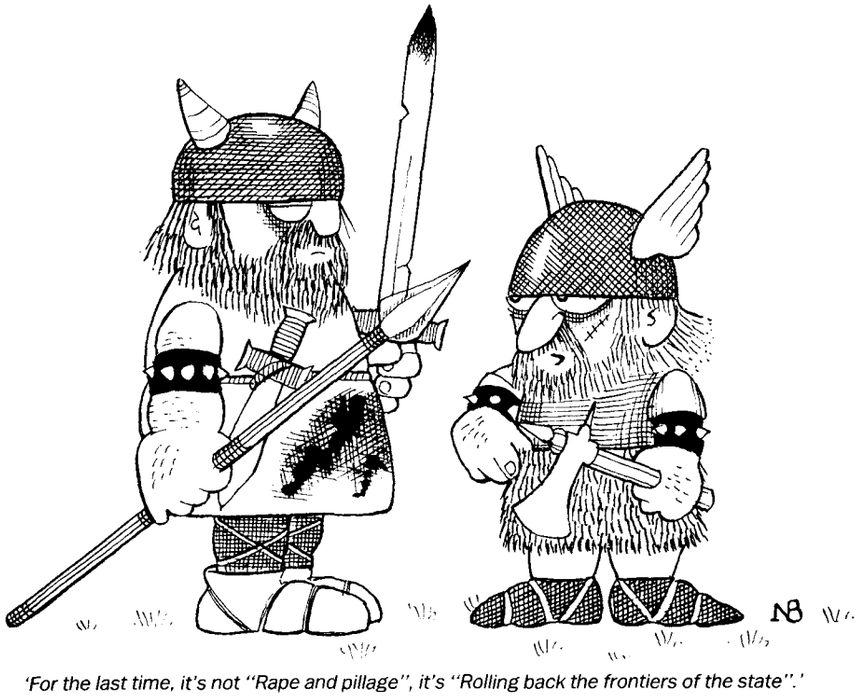
RECENT SPECULATION has concentrated on two possible trends, one favourable to the Conservatives, the other unfavourable. Much excitement has been generated in recent months by a number of polls which have suggested that the Conservatives' vote was holding up better in its crucial marginal seats than elsewhere in the country. While Labour was recovering much of the support it lost in 1983 in its heartlands, it was not doing so where it mattered. These polls have led some to conclude that the Conservatives could secure a comfortable victory on little more than a 40 per cent share of the national vote.

Some of the results from the West Midlands appeared to support this contention. Poor results in Birmingham and Wolverhampton, in particular, meant that the Conservatives were actually ahead of Labour in Wolverhampton North East and Birmingham Perry Barr which Labour won in 1983. But this did not reflect any general pattern in the marginals (or indeed in the West Midlands; few have noticed that Labour did relatively well in Coventry).

Indeed if anything, the Conservatives did rather worse in their marginal seats than in the country as a whole. In a sample of 100 parliamentary constituencies where the local election results were collected by the *Guardian* and the BBC, the Conservative share of the vote fell — compared with June 1983 — by 4 per cent in Conservative/Labour marginals, and by 6 per cent in Con/Alliance and three-way marginals, but by only 3 per cent in safe seats. While there is some evidence from the 1979 general election that incumbent MPs can dampen the swing against them in marginal seats, no satisfactory explanation has been given which could account for the substantially different movement in marginal seats that some polls have detected. It looks as though it would be unwise for the Conservatives to expect a substantial differential movement in their favour in their marginal seats.

Certain sections of the left have been clutching at a different straw — tactical voting. If the election next month *does* produce the kind of overall national position indicated by the 7 May poll, then a strong tactical switch in 15 or so seats might be enough to deprive the Conservatives of an overall majority. But last Thursday's poll provided little encouragement for the tactical voting campaign.

In order to assess the extent of tactical voting,



'For the last time, it's not "Rape and pillage", it's "Rolling back the frontiers of the state".'

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the relevant level of analysis in a local election is the ward rather than the parliamentary constituency. If tactical voting occurred on any significant scale we would expect each of the parties to have produced its worst results where it started off in third position.

Table 2

Third Party, 1983	Change in % share compared with May 1983		
	Con	Lab	All.
Con	−1.7	+1.4	+0.3
Lab	−5.4	−0.3	+5.7
All.	−3.2	−3.9	+6.6
All seats	−3.2	−2.5	+5.7

So far as the Conservatives and the Alliance are concerned, the very opposite of what we might anticipate was true. As table 2 shows, in our sample of wards both those parties actually did best in improving their position in those wards where they had been third in 1983. And in Labour's case while they did best in wards where they shared first and second place with the Alliance (in many of which the Alliance lost ground) they still did better in wards where they were third in 1983 than across the sample as a whole.

What emerges from these local election results is that when it does well in a ward, the Alliance takes more of its support from the first-placed party than the third-placed party. In the following table we look at the results in those wards where the Alliance's share of the vote rose up above its May 1983 showing by the overall average or more (5 per cent), and examine what happened to the other two parties' vote. Where the Conservatives were the stronger their vote fell the most: and where Labour were the stronger, then it was their vote that fell.

Table 3

Con % of Con + Lab vote, May 1983	Change in % share, May 1983-May 1987			
	All. up 5-10%		Over 10%	
	Con	Lab	Con	Lab
70% plus	−7.8	+0.5	−14.0	−4.4
55-70%	−5.8	−1.9	−11.0	−6.1
45-55%	−2.6	−4.3	−9.1	−9.3
30-45%	−2.8	−4.6	−7.8	−9.5
less than 30%	−1.5	−6.0	−5.8	−12.1

Such a pattern is of course more helpful to the Alliance in its quest for seats than if it were primarily dependent upon third-placed votes. Indeed, it may have helped to counteract for them the effect of an adverse trend which was apparent at the last general election, and which was with the Alliance again last Thursday — the 'plateau effect'. In those wards in our sample where the Alliance vote was less than 30 per cent in 1983, the Alliance vote increased on average by 6.7 per cent. On the other hand, where its vote was between 30 and 40 per cent, it registered an average increase of only 2.8 per cent, while in its best wards where its 1983 vote had been over 40 per cent it could add only 0.3 per cent to its support. *Some of the Alliance's worst results occurred in wards where earlier strong local election support appears to have withered away.*

The local election results provide neither the Conservatives with the certainty of winning on 11 June nor the opposition parties with an indication that the electorate is prepared to use the electoral system to stop them from doing so. Both sides have a lot to play for in the coming campaign. □

MEDIA

Columnists for Kinnock

Denis MacShane

CAN ANYONE, except possibly John Cunningham, remember how the *Guardian* reported the difficulties faced by Labour's environment spokesperson as he struggled to reconcile Labour Party anti-nuclearism and his duty to his constituents?

Those for whom the answer to this unimportant question is 'No' should turn to page 182 of Michael Leapman's new biography of Neil Kinnock.* There they will find the leader of the Labour Party, one of these days likely to be prime minister, so exercised by how the *Guardian* reported Cunningham's tribulations that he would phone up to badger night editors and write out long corrections that were speeded round to Farringdon Road.

The almost unbelievably bad personal relations that Kinnock now has with national newspaper journalists is the most interesting fact to emerge from Leapman's succinct account of Kinnock's 40 months of leadership. Leapman, with three highly professional decades of newspaper reporting behind him — as well as excellent books on Rupert Murdoch, TV AM and the BBC to his credit — rightly focuses on this aspect of Kinnock's time as Labour Party leader. His account of Kinnock sitting aloof on a long plane ride to Atlanta refusing to say hello to accompanying journalists is a horror story.

Many will sympathise with Kinnock's despair at the mauling he and his party receive from the press and his angry reaction may at first sight be understandable. As he opens the quality, let alone the popular papers there is no significant support from any quarter.

Britain is unique in Europe in having no opinion-forming newspapers or journals with a respectable circulation which take seriously the ideas, policies and representatives of the major left party. France and Germany have a vicious right-wing press that yields nothing to the *Sun* or *Daily Mail* in political nastiness. But in addition to major daily papers — like *Le Monde* or the *Frankfurter Rundschau* which are broadly neutral, and often friendly to the left — the *Nouvel Observateur* and *Der Spiegel*, with their power-broking readership of over one million apiece, take it as axiomatic that a left-wing party of potential government should be treated seriously (though never with reverence).

Indeed, Jean Daniel's weekly column in the *Nouvel Observateur* has, over two decades, been an influential commentary on what French socialists are, could be or should be doing. Daniel is of the same age as François Mitterrand, just as Juan Luis Cebran, editor of Spain's *El País*, is of Felipe Gonzalez's generation and has played an important role in guiding and chiding the Spanish socialists without compromising his paper's integrity.

IN CONTRAST, American columnists are expected to treat the American political process and its parties and personalities as worthy of serious consideration. So the *New York Times*'s magisterial James Reston, who can be cold and cutting about Republicans and Democrats, never descends to the sneering, dismissive, condescending writing about Labour to be found in the columns of most British quality papers.

Part of the problem is that so many columnists are of a generation whose illusions were shaped by Gaitskell, raised to high hopes by Wilson's appeal in 1964 and then dashed by the cynicism of his time in office. One senses that columnists like Peter Jenkins, Brian Walden, Bernard Levin, Simon Jenkins, Anthony Howard and Alan Watkins all belong to this group — and nothing will make them take Labour seriously again as a party of ideas, hope and worth.

Of course there is the *Guardian*, where Hugo Young majestically moralises about the excesses of Thatcherism. Yet despite the unmatched vitality and originality of his writing he too has the feel of not wanting to take seriously the Labour Party, led by so slight and young (compared to the middle-aged weight and omniscience of the average national columnist) a figure as Neil Kinnock. Is it healthy for democracy that hardly any national paper has a regular columnist willing, with required detachment and pungency, to take mainstream Labour movement proposals seriously? (As ever, the golden exception is Europe's finest newspaper, the *Financial Times*, but in terms of national political life it is not, apart from Samuel Brittan's writings, an agenda-setting paper.)

None of this is Kinnock's fault — though, as in every election since 1945, Labour now shies away from proposing press reform, despite the increasing economic as well as political importance of the media. But is it also necessary to alienate quite so many journalists in the way Leapman outlines in his book?

KINNOCK HAS roller-coasted from a high of almost promiscuous friendship with journalists in his pre-leadership days as the Bonny Prince Neil of party and parliament to the current low of icy rejection and hostility described by Leapman. Yet his press team — headed by Pat Hewitt in his private office and Peter Mandelson at Labour headquarters — is high-quality, professional and hard-working. If he cannot expect (nor should he) the toadying elicited by the Prime Minister, he can get a fair hearing in some quarters. Like all Labour leaders, he is cruelly exposed to a hostile and mendacious press, and he has to fashion a strategy which can cope with it, at least. The days when Clement Attlee could assent to a Press Association machine in No 10 only because it gave him the latest cricket scores are an affectionate but distant memory.

Yet as Kinnock's hero Franklin D. Roosevelt showed, during an era when most of the American press were bitterly hostile to his policies, nothing replaces warmth, a personal touch, a couldn't-care-less chivalry even (perhaps especially) when dealing with the enemy's heralds. Great leaders grit their teeth and rise above squalid and malicious press coverage. 'If you can't get even, don't get mad' should be Kinnock's motto. □

* *Kinnock* by Michael Leapman, published by Unwin Hyman, £10.95

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MI5

The secret stuff of the hustings

PETER HENNESSY *argues that spies should be an issue in the election — but won't be*

SIX YEARS ago Dr David Owen paid a remarkable tribute to the secret servants of the state who had supplied him with clandestine information when he was Foreign Secretary in the late '70s. He made MI6 sound almost like a citadel of Alliance values. They were scrupulous in referring to him matters with a political content requiring decisions by democratically elected ministers.

'I didn't get the feeling that I was dealing with a reactionary bunch of people at all,' he said. 'Dealing with things like Southern Africa and race, I found them very broad-minded and not by any means the sort of archetypal right-wing figure.' At the time it was very reassuring.

MI6 people do not like being lumped with MI5 folk. There has always been an element of snobbery in it comparable to the disdain that some Foreign Office people display towards the Home Civil Service. But, for all the internal rivalry, the secret world has always been something of a seamless garment since the foundation of the Secret Service Bureau during the Edwardian arms race.

In their 78-year life, the secret agencies have never become an election issue though they should have been in 1924 when the Zinoviev letter was doing the rounds and, if Peter Wright is to be believed, they should have been once more in both of the 1974 elections.

If reason is any guide, the condition of the secret world will be an issue at the polls in 1987. But, when democracy goes on heat at election time, reason is the first casualty. If the secret state is an issue this time it will be thanks, paradoxically, to Dr Owen, lyricist of that hymn of praise in 1981, who has consistently made the case for a form of parliamentary oversight. Conventional wisdom holds that there are no votes in it. Conventional wisdom is probably right.

> *The condition of MI5* should *be an election issue if for no other reason than providing a demonstration that ours is* not *the most deferential electorate in the world*

The trail of claims and counterclaims about the secret world since Mrs Thatcher became Prime Minister is exceedingly hard to map even for those with a higher than usual interest in such matters. It's a question worthy of *Mastermind*: place in chronological order the Prime Minister's statements on the following — Peter Wright, Roger Hollis, Maurice Oldfield, Michael Bettaney, Anthony Blunt and Geoffrey Prime. It's all very complicated and not amenable to instant reprocessing as election fodder.

Nonetheless, the condition of MI5, if not of MI6, *should* be an election issue if for no other reason than providing a demonstration that ours is *not* the most deferential electorate in the world. For Mrs Thatcher's statement last week on the claims made in Peter Wright's *Spycatcher* could only be reassuring to a nation of supine forelock-tuggers. Mr Wright's demeanour and headgear may, in their frequent television appearances, have given the impression of eccentricity. But we are now asked to believe that his *Spycatcher* is comparable to the fake Hitler diaries — a falsehood in every particular from beginning to end and, by implication, that Peter Wright, former personal assistant to Sir Michael Hanley, when Director-General of MI5 and, prior to that, their great house expert on bugging and burgling, sat down in his Tasmanian farmhouse and wrote a spy novel, a deliberate piece of fiction.

Is that credible? Only up to a point, Sir Antony Duff. Any memoir has its share of inaccuracies. Old men forget and memory plays tricks. But on such a scale? And Peter Wright must have been a pretty good actor to simulate tears and pain when his helper, Paul Greengrass, uncovered Sir Michael Hanley's letter of 1977 with its coded reference to the old firm having passed its examination.

NO INCUMBENT in No 10 would want the secret services to become the stuff of the hustings. The statement Mrs Thatcher could have made last week to avoid that drafts itself:

> Mr Speaker, I wish to inform the House that after weighing the words of the Rt Hon. member for Cardiff South (Sir James Callaghan), whose judgement and experience on such matters I respect, I have come to the conclusion that an inquiry into the very serious allegations about alleged Security Service plots to bring down an elected government of this country has to be undertaken. Public reassurance requires no less. The Director-General of the Security Service has already carried out his own four-month investigation. He tells me he has found nothing that would substantiate those allegations and I have every confidence in his judgement. Nevertheless, the establishment of a lasting and wider public confidence is necessary. I shall therefore be commissioning a small committee of privy counsellors to consider and report on the performance and conduct of MI5 in the period 1973-77. I shall invite the leaders of the Opposition parties to nominate one member each to sit on the committee whose chairman will be announced in the next few weeks.

With Sir James Callaghan nodding approval from the backbenches, Mr Neil Kinnock, Mr David Steel and Dr Owen would have risen in turn to commend the Prime Minister's action and to pledge full co-operation; bipartisanship on security matters would have been seen to be restored; and MPs could have happily left Westminster to open bags of manure over each other's heads as is traditional at election time. There was a precedent for such an inquiry in Lord Frank's committee of privy counsellors on the Falklands which Mrs Thatcher set up in the summer of 1982, which perused the most sensitive intelligence material and on which sat two men, Lord Lever and Mr Merlyn Rees, who had been nominated by the then Leader of the Opposition, Mr Michael Foot. With the announcement of a Franks on MI5, the issue would have been defused — apart from a possible furore if and when *Spycatcher* was published in full in Australia — until deep into 1988 when the committee reported.

To have chosen the 'Great and the Good' solution would have been wise for all the reasons — strategic and tactical, noble and venal. It remains the best solution and the opposition party leaders should say so at routine intervals throughout the election campaign. There is another reason for favouring the privy counsellor option. The committee of inquiry into the 1970s could serve very neatly as the test-bed for a more permanent oversight body which, Downing Street apart, seems to be an idea whose time has come. All the opposition parties favour it, as does Sir James Callaghan. There have been persistent hints that the permanent guardians of national security in Whitehall now favour it too.

Unless the electorate removes her from No 10, the next set of hearts and minds to be won over are those which pump and cerebrate next to Mrs Thatcher at ministerial meetings on intelligence and security — those of Mr Douglas Hurd, Sir Geoffrey Howe, Mr Tom King and Mr George Younger and, perhaps most crucial of all, the veteran Lord Whitelaw. If, collectively, they were persuaded of the virtues of oversight only an example of unashamed prime ministerial government could overrule them. □

Peter Hennessy is a Visiting Fellow at the Policy Studies Institute and author of The Great and the Good: An Inquiry into the British Establishment *(PSI, 100 Park Village East, NW1, £4.95).*

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ECONOMICS

Following America on down

Paul Ormerod

WHAT FOLLOWS will not play much part in the general election campaign. But it is the reality which underlies government claims of a boom economy.

The United States is in economic crisis: it will be ours in the 1990s. Years of low investment in new machinery, low productivity growth, poor export performance and rising import penetration have come to a head in 1987. The weakness of the US economy is now transparent. It is this weakness which threatens to plunge the world into economic recession.

The US faces a long-term structural balance of payments problem. The over-valuation of the dollar in 1984 and 1985 has been the short-term trigger which reveals the crisis. In 1981 there was a small surplus on the US current account balance of payments (exports minus imports). In 1982 there was a small deficit. The deficit now is over $100 billion a year. Putting the figures in a British context, the average annual balance of payments deficit in the United States from 1984 through 1986 has been the equivalent of a £12 billion annual deficit in the UK. The American current account deficit is over $100 billion a year. The Japanese surplus is approaching that amount. To balance these deficits and surpluses in trade, there must be a capital inflow into the US and a capital outflow from Japan.

The US *has* succeeded in attracting capital inflows to balance its debts. But confidence in the American economy is essential to ensure the continuing movement of funds into Wall Street and it is this confidence which is disappearing fast. The dollar is under threat and American interest rates have risen. A further loss of confidence could trigger off a massive outflow of funds. In such circumstances, the American authorities would have no choice but to increase interest rates dramatically in order to stabilise capital flows and to prop up the dollar. Protectionist measures would be of no avail. Interest rates would have to rise by between three and five percentage points. Such a step would, in fact, stabilise the dollar. It would also burst the consumer boom in the US, and plunge the economy into a deep recession.

America still accounts for over a quarter of the industrialised world's output. A recession in the US of itself would depress the rest of the world. A recession precipitated by rocketing interest rates would be even worse, as pressure on interest rates spread to Western Europe as a whole. The balance of payments problem which underlies this threat to world prosperity is not a temporary phenomenon: it has been building up over decades. The immediate cause was the over-valuation of the dollar in 1984 and 1985 which priced American goods out of world markets and led to a flood of imports into the US. The combination of the strong dollar and the wave of golds at the 1984 Olympics triggered a wave of American nationalism and ensured the re-election of President Reagan and the American people are now paying the price.

The structural balance of payments problems which allowed this situation to develop are long term. Contrary to received opinion, the American economy has been weak in the post-war years — particularly since the early 1960s. On a number of key indicators of economic performance, the US has the worst record of all the major world economies. Even the UK has performed better than the US on many counts.The difference is admittedly small, but in a league table of performance in the past 20 years, it would be America which would disappear into the Vauxhall Opel League, while the UK would stay in the Fourth Division.

PRODUCTIVITY growth is the key to economic performance. It is this which allows competitiveness in world markets to be sustained and both living standards and profits to rise. Yet since the early 1960s, the US record is abysmal. From 1964 to 1986, productivity in the American economy grew by only 1 per cent a year. In the UK, the average annual growth rate has been 2 per cent a year. In West Germany, the figure is 3 per cent, and in Japan 4.5 per cent. Low productivity in turn arises to a large extent from low levels of capital investment and a deskilled labour force.

> ***'Growth in the UK is being sustained by the devaluation of the pound against the Deutschmark. But recently the pound has been allowed to climb to enable interest rates to be cut in the run up to the election. Its effects will be felt in 1988 with yet another year of low export and high import growth'***

Spending on new plant and machinery as a proportion of total national spending has been persistently lower in both Britain and America than in the rest of the developed world. This means that the industrial capital stock of the UK and the US is smaller as a proportion of national output than the amount of physical investment available for production in Japan, West Germany, France, Italy and so on. More importantly, it means that the machinery in use incorporates less of the most advanced technology than that in other countries. Some sectors of the US economy are very high-tech — mainly associated with the defence industries. But the average is low.

Combined with low levels of spending on new machinery, the skills of the average American worker are falling behind those of the rest of the developed world. At the highest levels of skill, the Americans excel. But graduates from the top-flight American universities are only a tiny proportion of the total labour force. Two examples from the armed forces illustrate this point.

First, the American army is so concerned about the low educational standards of its new members that it is making desperate attempts to recruit women. This is because, given the more limited labour force opportunities open to women, the armed forces can recruit them from a higher average educational level than is the case with men. Second, comic-strip presentation is increasingly being used in training manuals instead of the more traditional approach. Presentation is important, as we are all aware nowadays, but it is the increasing inability of recruits to understand conventional written presentations which has brought this about. More generally, levels of literacy and numeracy are falling throughout the United States.

The weakness of the US economy is reflected in its trade performance. Since 1976, the volume of American exports has risen by 35 per cent. In contrast, the colume of imports has risen by no less than 82 per cent. The American economic problem is symbolised by the American car. Who in his or her senses would buy such a product outside the United States itself? Increasingly, *within* the US, consumers prefer foreign cars.

All this is depressingly familiar to Britain. Indeed, 'UK' and 'British' could be substituted for 'US' and 'American' almost throughout, and the above statements would still hold true. British exports since 1976, for example, have risen by only 24 per cent and imports are up 46 per cent in volume terms. And these figures include the net trade boost of North Sea oil. Without this factor, the gap between British export and import growth is very similar to that of America.

Britain does have a long-term structural weakness on the balance of payments. The existence of a balance of payments constraint has been the key feature of the British economy in the past 40 years. It has not disappeared. Since the mid-1970s, it has been camouflaged by oil, which has enabled governments to sustain personal consumption at a level unwarranted by the production side of the economy.

In an election year, growth in the UK is being sustained by the devaluation of the pound which took place last year, principally against the Deutschmark, the currency of the dominant economic power in Western Europe. But in recent months the pound has been allowed to climb, both as a device against inflation by making imports cheaper, and as a mechanism to enable interest rates to be cut in the run up to the election. The present overvaluation of the pound is minor compared to the unsustainably high levels which the dollar reached in 1984 and 1985, but its effects will be felt in 1988 with yet another year of low export and high import growth.

North Sea oil is not about to disappear. Even in 1992 production will still be around four-fifths of its present level. The real crisis for the UK comes during the 1990s, as the serious decline in oil production begins. But from now on there will be no more growth in oil production and revenues to sustain the economy. Without a fundamental restructuring of the economy, the problems which Britain will face into the 1990s can be seen writ large in America today. The election will determine which party will prepare us for that time. □

Paul Ormerod is director of the Henley Centre.

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All words and no talks?

COLLEEN JOHNSON *reports on the manoeuvres towards an Arab-Israeli conference*

THE MIDDLE EAST crisis is no nearer resolution today. Despite the current high profile of diplomatic moves to convene an international conference, enormous obstacles remain in the way of negotiations between the two central players, the Israelis and the Palestinians. The main problem is that there are essentially two different conferences on offer. One is backed by the Palestine Liberation Organisation, the Soviet Union and the Arab countries: the other by Israel and the United States.

The latest round of shuttle diplomacy began after last month's meeting in Algiers of the PLO's parliament-in-exile. The PLO ended a four-year split in its ranks by welcoming back George Habash's Popular Front (PFLP) and Nayef Hawatmeh's Democratic Front (DFLP). This new unity poses a threat to Israel and the Arab states, which have often used divisions among Palestinians to further their own political ends. Arafat can now assert that *only* the PLO can speak for Palestinians at any forthcoming conference.

A conference is, however, very much a long-term strategy for the PLO. Arafat told the *New Statesman*: 'I expect a conference to be held in a year or two. The next step is an Arab summit, hopefully within the year.' He insists it be convened under the auspices of the UN Security Council, with clearly defined powers of arbitration and with the PLO on equal footing with all other interested parties.

While pursuing diplomatic paths, Arafat re-emphasised his commitment to the armed struggle. He also told the *NS*: 'We have decided not to be slaves and not to be Red Indians.' Habash summed up widespread Palestinian scepticism about concessions from Israel when he said: 'Without changing the balance of power between the Israelis on the one hand and the Palestinians and Arabs on the other, Israel will not withdraw one inch from the Occupied Territories.'

Faced with a re-unified, and therefore stronger PLO, Israel's Foreign Minister Shimon Peres has accelerated his call for a conference — but one to which the PLO would not be invited. He claimed to have reached agreement on the terms with America, Egypt and Jordan, though this is officially denied by President Mubarak and King Hussein.

Peres's conference would *also* be under UN Security Council auspices, but it would have no arbitration powers and would be merely a preparatory step to direct talks with Jordan over the West Bank, and with Egypt over the Gaza Strip. Peres has also not outlined how much land — if any — is on offer, apart from stressing that Jerusalem is not negotiable. Yet even such a limited conference is opposed by Prime Minister Shamir, who wants to move straight to direct 'peace treaties' with Jordan and Egypt. A steadfast believer in 'Greater Israel', he refuses to concede any territory.

Peres therefore took his proposals to an inner-cabinet vote on Monday. The resulting deadlock was a foregone conclusion as Peres's Labour Party and Shamir's right-wing Likud are evenly represented. Likud members called Peres's proposals 'vague, superficial, unclear and short of clarification'.

If further meetings produce no consensus, then conference plans will either be shelved or new elections called, thus ending the 30-month national unity government. It remains uncertain whether the Labour Party could win fresh elections outright, and a new coalition would not necessarily leave Peres's hands any freer.

The Israeli-backed conference rests on the premise that King Hussein would go to the negotiating table without the PLO. Relations between Hussein and Arafat are bad, but it is unlikely Hussein would risk widespread Arab condemnation, even in face of the PLO's decision at Algiers last month to abrogate the 1985 Amman agreement on joint Jordanian-Palestinian representation. He knows his support in the West Bank is extremely limited — less than four per cent in a recent poll — and he has no need to stick his neck out in a deal with Israel if there is nothing tangible on offer.

THE COUNTRY to watch at the moment is Syria. President Assad is steadily dismantling the obstacles in the way of convening an Arab summit. First, he had a secret meeting with his arch-enemy of eight years, President Saddam Hussein of Iraq, which suggests Syria is distancing itself from supporting Iran in the Gulf War. Second, he had talks with Habash about recognising the re-unified PLO which he has done so much to splinter in recent years: this could lead to a meeting between Assad and his other great enemy, Arafat.

The unlikely alliance of Saudi Arabia and the Soviet Union is understood to be behind these latest developments, with the promise of increased financial aid to Syria's ailing economy. The Soviet Union is now spinning a complex web of ties throughout the region. The Soviets support the Palestinians' right to an independent state and refuse to restore diplomatic links with Israel unless it pulls out of the area occupied in 1967. China has a similar stand.

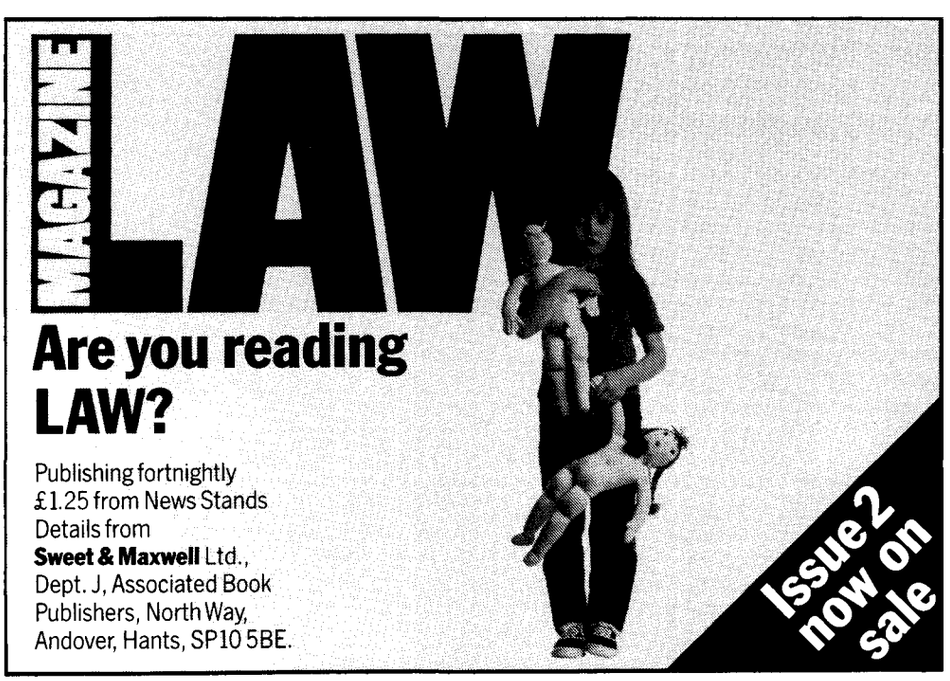
Nonetheless, rumours of secret talks between Russian, Chinese and Israeli officials *have* been surfacing. It is possible that if either the Chinese or the Russians were assured that Israel would give up substantial land, they might be prepared to renew links in order to gain a seat at the conference. Both insist, however, that the PLO must be present.

America is sending out signals that it wants to make initiatives in the area. American credibility in the Middle East has been greatly sapped since Irangate, so the State Department is throwing its weight behind Peres's proposals. Like the Israelis, they insist the PLO must stop the armed struggle and accept UN resolution 242 passed in 1967.

242 is widely interpreted as accepting Israel's right to exist within secure borders, while referring to the Palestinian question as simply one of 'refugees'. The PLO will not accept 242 in isolation, but says it will accept all UN resolutions together — including 3236, which maintains the Palestinians' right to national independence.

In this year, the 20th anniversary of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, that disputed area is now a de facto part of Israel. Israeli politicians who talk of exchanging land for peace are met with profound scepticism in the Palestinian camp, which sometimes actually seems to prefer those, like Prime Minister Shamir, who openly boast they won't give an inch. Said one PLO official in Algiers: 'Shamir's cards are on the table, Peres's are up his sleeve.'

There is much movement, but small hopes. No politician can afford to be sidelined while talks about talks are in the air; but the differences and the tension presently seem too great, the rewards too small and uncertain, for any realistic initiative to issue forth. □



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The squeeze on the Contras

HUGH O'SHAUGHNESSY ***reports on the 'impossible situation' Ronald Reagan's most favoured freedom fighters now occupy***

Miami

TIMES, IT need hardly be repeated, are hard in Nicaragua and tempers are snappish. Faced with aggression sponsored by the world's strongest power, the Nicaraguan government has no alternative to devoting half its budget to defence. The Nicaraguan people, less than three million of them, have no alternative to queueing, shortages and stunted lives, their morale sapped by Washington's huge propaganda campaign. With some Sandinista leaders hinting that it is time to go back on the decision to abolish the death penalty, the 1979 dream of humane revolution looks in danger of fading a little. That Nicaraguan society still coheres at all is little short of a miracle.

As the Congressional and judicial inquiries into the scandal of US policies towards Nicaragua work towards their climax this summer in Washington, Nicaraguans can console themselves, if they want, with the knowledge that, however bad things are with them, they are going worse for the Contras. In every sphere, the military, the political and the diplomatic, the tide is flowing against President Reagan's protégés. When the time comes in the autumn for the US Congress to decide their fate it looks increasingly likely that they will be cut adrift as General Thieu, the Shah of Iran and Ferdinand Marcos, their political predecessors, were cut adrift.

That, of course, is not what you hear from them and their supporters as they expound the official theses.

From well back into last year senior officials and junior diplomats in US embassies from Grosvenor Square to Tegucigalpa have been impressing on me how the big Contra push is just coming and that the Sandinistas had better look out. Every week, I am flattered to report, a fresh harvest of anathemas about the Nicaraguan dictatorship floods onto my desk from the United States Information Service. My vividest memory of January was that of Philip Habib, the US President's Central American troubleshooter, banging his fist and crying, 'But this is *our* back yard!'

Close friends

The Contras' headquarters is in a small office block overlooking Miami airport. It lies just across the road from the offices of Southern Air Transport, the airline formerly owned by the US Central Intelligence Agency. Various SAT aircraft have recently crashed in mysterious circumstances at US Air Force bases, but the airline continues stalwart in the service of the Contra cause ferrying goods and weapons to their fighters in Nicaragua. It is clearly handy for the two offices to be so close.

The anti-Sandinistas are clearly at home in Florida. The sun shines nearly as hot as it does in Managua and the infrastructure of the city works. With Cubans making up 40 per cent of the population no one need master English and the political atmosphere created by nearly three decades of Cuban emigré anti-Communism is ideal for the Contras' *antisandinismo*. The media are almost invariably kind, there are Spanish language channels on the TV and at the University of Miami among a small but vociferous group of Latin and Eastern European academics the Contras can find intellectual backing for their case. If Ian Smith were forced to emigrate to Pretoria he couldn't be more at home than Adolfo Calero is there beside the Miami River.

Adolfo Calero is the political soul of the Contra movement. He may not be a polished man with democratic tendencies like Arturo Cruz, Washington's favourite for the Contra leadership. Cruz is responsible, sensible, once worked for the Inter-American Development Bank and, after a period as the Sandinistas' ambassador to the US, deserted to the Contras. There is an aura of worried discontent about Cruz: Calero radiates power and the will to exercise it.

For a long time Cruz, Calero and a well-meaning businessman called Alfonso Robelo ran the Contra operation through the three-man directorate of the *Unidad Nicaragüense Opositora*, the United Nicaraguan Opposition.

Cruz and Calero both officially quit the UNO in February after a big falling out while Robelo retired to a safe distance. But last month in Miami Calero, still the president of the FDN, the principal guerrilla group, was clearly in command at the UNO office. On a table in his air-conditioned windowless office his briefcase lies ajar giving a tempting glimpse of a column of monthly figures adding up to $35 million. He sits behind it with complete composure born of the confidence that in the organisation what he says goes.

The three-man directorate is about to be swept away in favour of some new and ostensibly more democratic and representative body which will convey a better image. But with Calero and his brother Mario in charge of the bulk of Contra funds and with the FDN having the bulk of the fighters no one expects Calero's grip to be loosened. And besides he is backed by Enrique Bermúdez, the former colonel in Somoza's National Guard who is the Contras' main strategist.

The trouble is that Calero is no convinced democrat, as Cruz constantly complained. He is a man in the mould of Francisco Franco rather than Benjamin Franklin, who is looked on askance not just by Cruz but also by Alfredo César and other more 'progressive' Contras who are for the moment still allowed to live in Costa Rica and run the 'Southern Front'.

Victims of success

Given Calero's views and the human rights record of the Contra fighters under Bermúdez's leadership there can be no doubt that, if those two ever took power, Nicaragua would head back to the darkest days of the Somoza dictatorship.

Quite apart from any considerations of financial corruption, of which there has clearly been a great deal, the Contra leadership is obviously not a saleable commodity in terms of decent democratic politics.

Militarily, too, the Contras are in a bad way. That may seem a strange thing to say at a time when they are being provided with all the supplies that the $100 million voted by the US Congress can provide them with and in a month when US forces are being deployed in Honduras near the border with Nicaragua in an attempt to bolster the Contras and overawe the Sandinistas.

The Contras are, however, in some sense victims of the very success that President Reagan had in getting the US legislators to fund them. For months, if not years, the Reagan Administration has been promising that they will capture and hold

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land in Nicaragua. Now more than ever they must achieve. For the past few weeks Contra bases and offices and hospitals have been closed in their safe haven in Honduras and the personnel sent over the border to do what the US Congress has paid them to do, fight the Sandinistas.

In Miami and Tegucigalpa, the Honduran capital, the Contras, Hondurans and foreign diplomats all attest that the war is being carried into Nicaragua. 'We have men fighting in three-quarters of the land area of the country', claims Calero. 'We have no soldiers in Honduras', says Adela Ycaza, the smartly dressed Contra spokeswoman in Tegucigalpa. They both could add, but don't, that their hit-and-run operations principally take place in the sparsely inhabited centre and Caribbean coast of Nicaragua and that comparatively few engagements take place in that strip along the Pacific coast containing the towns of Managua, León, Granada and Chinandega where most of the population lives.

If they now have to take and occupy terrain, they will lose the advantage of mobility and initiative that has made it hard for the Nicaraguan army to wipe them out. No major population centre has risen in support of them. If Washington's tactic is to recognise a Nicaraguan government of the Contras based somewhere within the country, that can hardly be done credibly if Calero and Bermúdez are merely under canvas in some isolated camp in the jungle. (Apart from anything else, the South African and Israeli ambassadors would surely have to be parachuted in to present their credentials.)

Dirty warriors

Despite the insistence of Managua that the Contra forces are traitors without morals, it is clear that many in the rank-and-file are genuinely opposed to Sandinista policies on conscientious grounds and that many have quit Nicaragua to fight because of the difficulty of living in that country. In Tegucigalpa and in refugee camps run by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in the Honduran countryside that I visited last month, I came across former Contras who had given up fighting because of their disgust with the venality and fecklessness of their former commanders. The Contra forces, said to number around 12,000, have something of the feel of the Argentine army in the Falklands, an unsurprising fact given that Washington encouraged the Argentine military regime to befriend and support the Contras from the time of the Sandinista victory over Somoza onwards.

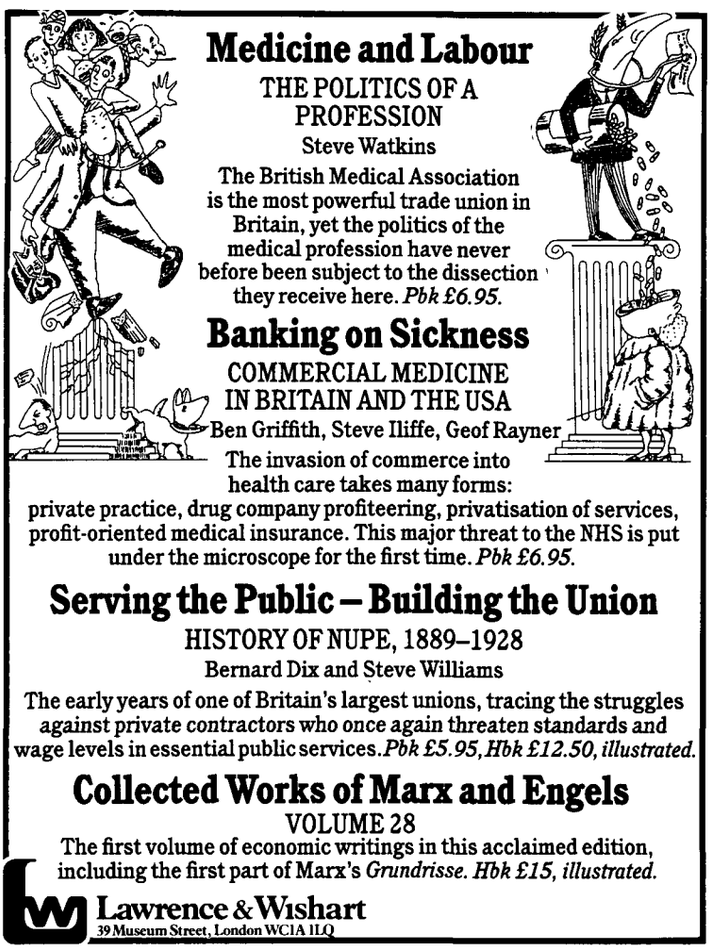
'A lot of the Contra Comandantes only hang around here for the money', commented one former fighter to me in Tegucigalpa. Despite the efforts of a 'Human Rights Association' funded by the US Congress for the Contras and run from a small bungalow in Tegucigalpa by Patricia Baltodano, a young Nicaraguan lawyer, the Contras are still committing atrocities against the civilian population which makes the parallels between the Contras' war and the Argentine generals' 'dirty war' all the closer.

Time and again in Honduras and Miami they would confess that their chances of overthrowing the Sandinistas by military means were virtually nil.

Nor have the Contras got any foreign friends, apart from those they rely on in Washington and Jerusalem. The Hondurans have loyally co-operated with them, lent them military facilities and given them logistical support. But now the combined effort of pretending to the world that such co-operation does not go on and of worrying that, if beaten, the Contra forces could create mayhem if they were all forced back into Honduras has forced a change in the declared attitude of President José Azcona of Honduras. He really wants to get rid of them into Nicaragua and quietly presses the Reagan Administration to undertake to give them homes in the United States if they are routed on the ground in Nicaragua.

In Costa Rica President Oscar Arias, unlike his predecessor, has forced them to halt most of their military activities and reined in their purely political ones. Arias, who visits London shortly, has launched a new peace plan, while Mexico and her three Latin American partners plod wearily on with the Contadora initiative. The more experienced Latin American hands at the State Department know that if the US were in fact to engineer the overthrow of the Sandinistas by the Contras the reaction from the continent would be swift and violent. It would not be negligible from Europe, either.

Pity the Sandinistas, beleaguered by the hostility of President Reagan. But spare a thought, too, for the Contras. They're in a really impossible situation. □



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SECRET SOCIETY

4. Defences down

In the fourth report from his **Secret Society** *BBC-2 TV series,* **DUNCAN CAMPBELL** *reveals that every major new radar defence system since 1945 has been a failure. Four billion-pound projects have gone wrong — and more disasters are on the way*

BRITAIN'S AIR DEFENCES have been unable to do their job almost continuously since the end of the Second World War. Now, in the view of the RAF's most senior officers, the air force is 'incapable of defending Britain from large-scale enemy attack'. That's what the air staff told the *Sunday Telegraph* one month ago. Investigating the past, present, and future of RAF radar systems, *Secret Society* found that governments have invariably concealed and covered up problems with radar — until it was far too late.

In the last six months, two major technical setbacks have centred on radar equipment ordered from the GEC-Marconi group. Some £930 million was thrown away when the Nimrod early warning aircraft system had to be scrapped last December. It will cost £860 million to replace it with a half-size fleet of American-built AWACS. It will also mean a delay of nine years in getting any modern airborne warning system into operation.

One month after the Nimrod cancellation, defence workers leaked information to MPs that the £650 million GEC 'Foxhunter' radar system for the Tornado fighter aircraft was also technically deficient. To mask the fact that the Tornado's specially-designed radar doesn't work and can't be installed, some of the pride of the RAF's fighter force now fly with sacks of concrete in their nosecones. So the fighters the Tornados should replace, 30-year-old Lightnings, are still being kept going — though they leak oil so profusely they are a major safety hazard, and parts have been observed to fall off as they prepare for flight.

Senior military officers try to make the best of the shambles of front-line radar and air defence equipment. Air Chief Marshal Sir Peter Harding, the Commander in Chief of UK Air Defence Region, told me last year that although the RAF's Bloodhound missile force — a 30-year-old castoff from forces in Germany — were rather long in the tooth 'like an 18th century knife that's had four new blades and three new handles', they could 'go on for a very long time'.

The existing early warning squadron, a few Shackletons originally designed in 1941, were, says Harding, 'better than nothing'. But it was scarcely reassuring that the RAF were having surreptitiously to cannibalise parts from kindred aircraft on museum display in order to keep the defence line operating out over the North Sea.

Hardly more reassuring was the Air Chief Marshal's candid evalution of another problem radar system, called IFF. When it was put to him that it doesn't work — and when it goes wrong, the RAF and NATO will lose many aircraft to their own side — Sir Peter agreed. IFF problems will cost the RAF aircraft and lives — but the same difficulty afflicts Warsaw Pact air forces. 'They have [an IFF problem] too', he pointed out. 'And, of course if they have many more aircraft than we do, then they have many more chances of shooting down their own aeroplanes than we do ours.'

Woolly sausages

In the early days of the Second World War, the first pioneering radar network, Chain Home, was erected right across Britain. It has since been completely revamped twice — on both occasions with a marked lack of judgment or success. The third revamp is now under way, and early signs suggest that it is already as big a problem as the

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projects it replaces.

The 'Rotor' system, installed in the early 1950s, was the first revamp of the old radar chain. The surprise explosion of the first Soviet A-bomb in 1949 led quickly to a panic to re-arm and to protect military installations from atomic attack. Irrespective of the effectiveness or obsolescence of the radar equipment then installed, no less than 80 radar stations and 1,600 radar monitoring positions were relocated underground, sometimes very deep underground.

The Rotor plan took five years to complete, sparing little expense to construct what was in effect a British underground electronic Maginot Line. Yet even the best radar then available was short-range, and with an erratic and unreliable display screen. Former fighter controller John Bushby recalled that:

> [The] blip which . . . represented the aircraft was always referred to as a sausage because it was an enormous long woolly sort of blob on the tube . . . any accuracy in aircraft positioning was more by judgment [than] by instrument.

In 1955, a new and long-range 'Type 80' radar quickly showed that most of the costly Rotor network should be made redundant. The 1950s equivalent of computer software — numerous WRAFs and plotting boards — meant that fast jet aircraft could have gone home by the time plotters caught up with their position. According to Bushby, a fighter controller could be ordered to attack an invader but then 'look on his radar tube and there wasn't a thing in the sky'.

The Rotor plan came to a quick, costly and secret end. Of 75 stations in the original Rotor network, 30 had closed by the start of 1958. By 1959, 61 stations had closed. By 1964, only five radar stations were left. Most of the Rotor underground fortresses were left, desolate and derelict, as they remain today.

Although the Soviet Union could hardly have failed to note that 70 of 75 British radar stations had rapidly gone off the air, the British public and Parliament were left in complete ignorance. There were no leaks, no debates, and no parliamentary questions. The one and only officially authorised report about Rotor appeared in the *Financial Times* in June 1961. The report noted the Marconi company's magnificent efforts in constructing Rotor and praised the network as 'ultra sophisticated'. But it omitted to mention that the entire system had been dismantled three years previously.

Baroque system

The H-bomb era of the 1960s presaged a new type of radar network. Plans for immediate nuclear retaliation meant that all that was needed from radar was a tripwire to say that an attack was coming. Then the V Bombers would take off. A new plan, codenamed Linesman, involved only three RAF radar stations and one giant new headquarters, intended as a single top-level and top-secret national defence control centre.

A network of Post Office towers was built to relay radar screen 'pictures' to the new Post Office tower in London. From there secret links transmitted the complete radar information to the national control centre at West Drayton near Heathrow airport. This was the heart of Linesman. There, the entire radar defence network was to be computerised, using specially built new computers from the Plessey company (then the Automatic Telephone and Electric Co). The computers were to run everything. In an ugly chequered brown building codenamed L-1, huge coloured screens should be able to portray the changing defence situation to watching military chiefs.

A major snag in the Linesman computer plan was that the Automatic Telephone and Electric Co didn't build computers. It built telephone exchanges. And for Linesman, they built computers that looked and operated just like telephone exchanges, offering for the heart of the nation's defence a computer system with less reliability even than the Post Office STD telephone system of the 1960s. The Linesman computers never worked; they couldn't communicate with each other, were perpetually overloaded, and continually broke down. According to Linesman programmer Mel Wallis, the system 'never did operate'. Outside experts were sent to West Drayton to try to sort out the computer problems — but, says Wallis, soon retreated in 'despair'.

Secret Society obtained computer specifications which describe for the first time what the doomed Linesman computers were actually supposed to do. The documents reveal that the computers were built before anyone had any idea how to write programmes for them — a bit like building a car before you realised that it might need wheels as well as an engine. Computer expert Guy Kewney studied the 'Restricted' plans and observed that:

> You would have been very lucky, I think, to have it going for maybe ten minutes a week . . . It was incredibly slow. It could perhaps have run a reasonably successful Traffic Management Scheme for a local borough council.

The L-1 centre had never been operational, and so the RAF's erstwhile grandiose national HQ lies gloomy and dust-layered, 'scrap' signs adorning the many rows of radar consoles. When it was finally written off in 1975, it had taken ten years and more than £200 million (in 1973 terms) to get nowhere. The whole RAF radar system had to be thrown back on operators at the three main outlying radar stations. Consultant Ray Curnow was one of the people asked to help try to sort Linesman's problems in the early 1970s. But salvage was impossible, according to Curnow. 'It was a real baroque system — incompetently managed, conceived and executed.'

Half-blind

Linesman also had some special vulnerabilities. Even if the computers and radar screens worked, there was one serious problem. The national control centre, computers, operators and all, were situated above ground. Just one high explosive bomb on West Drayton could have destroyed the lot. Moreover, all the data from the Post Office Tower was to be fed by various means to West Drayton, including an underground telephone cable running through Bayswater. The cable ran more or less directly underneath part of the Soviet Embassy. It was some years before anyone noticed that this could perhaps be a problem, and it was rerouted.

But the public and Parliament heard nothing official about these problems. The more things went awry, the greater the volume of inspired articles planted on reliable hacks and defence correspondents. In 1969, as despair at West Drayton became total, the *Daily Mirror* reported that:

> Linesman . . . will be a refreshing change from the parade of costly flops.

The truth was that the RAF soon had to inform the government that the project was 'so obsolete, it could not cope with any air threat'. Staff at the computer centre tried to alert MPs, without tangible results. When the project came under increasing criticism, a Parliamentary Select Committee asked for a full report. They never got it. All hope of using West Drayton as a control centre was abandoned, and the computers, which had still never worked, went on the scrapheap. Linesman was quietly and unceremoniously buried.

After the Linesman flop, an RAF team set about planning a new radar defence system for the late 1970s and 1980s. The new system was called the UK Air Defence Ground Environment (UKADGE). UKADGE's first problem was with the gaps which had opened up during the Linesman era. New types of hostile aircraft could easily fly across the sea at low level, underneath the umbrella of the giant east coast radar stations, and invisible to the radar watchers. Second, the longer range of more modern Soviet aircraft meant that they could sneak up on Britain from behind — from the west. What was left of Linesman was thus shown to be half-blind and looking avidly in the wrong direction. But all Britain's radar defences in the west had been closed down completely 20 years earlier, in a late, cost-cutting phase of the Rotor scheme.

A crash programme was announced to cover the threat from the west. New stations were built, and

More on 'Secret Society'

THE BBC has so far refused to transmit the fifth programme in the *Secret Society* series, 'Power Play', 'in a pre-election period'. The programme deals with unusual tactics adopted by the last two outgoing governments (Labour in 1979, Mrs Thatcher in 1983) to control public opinion and to stay in power at a time of a general election. The programme — which although untransmitted has already provoked extensive attacks on the BBC by Conservative lobby groups — was originally cleared in January 1987 by the former Director-General, Alasdair Milne, but the clearance was withdrawn by successor Michael Checkland.

The contents of the sixth, originally banned, programme, on the concealment of the Zircon spy satellite project from Parliament, were published by the *New Statesman* in January. Although the Home Secretary has stated that transmission of Zircon is up to the BBC, the Glasgow Procurator Fiscal service is still insisting on keeping every available transmission copy of the Zircon programme. Two weeks ago, BBC officials stated that the Director General 'would not consider' reassembling the Zircon programme until the police agreed to hand the original tapes back. ●

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ageing Shackleton surveillance aircraft revived and fitted with long-range radar. Improvements, which were added in a strictly *ad hoc* fashion, remain to this day. One of the most important front-line radar stations, at Buchan in northwest Scotland, now operates with a unique combination of an odd radar seized from Argentina in the Falklands war, and a 30-year-old 'Type 80'.

The new UKADGE system involves the construction of 11 large underground controls, a new communications network, and a chain of mobile radar stations which can move from position to position by road. It was originally supposed to come into service this year, but has 'slipped a little'. A key component of UKADGE was to have been the Nimrod early warning aircraft, itself due in service in 1984.

Nimrod failed because its computers and radar system have never worked even to a minimum official specification. One of the more spectacular problems occurred when it tried to track enemy aircraft flying over Britain, and was found unable to distinguish hostiles from cars travelling at high speed on motorways. Throughout 1986, GEC tried increasingly desperately to produce solutions to this and other problems.

To sort out articulated lorries from enemy helicopters and missiles, GEC had to install yet another computer inside the already tightly packed Nimrod. The problem was then shown to be 'solved' in July 1986 by the publication in the press of pictures of a large black box, prominently bearing the label 'GEC Avionics — vehicle correlator'. It had two switches, and when switched on, eliminated vehicle tracking — but only at the expense of not spotting slow moving enemy aircraft either. In the autumn of 1986, Defence Secretary George Younger ordered a final, deciding playoff between Nimrod and the American AWACS. Nimrod lost. Meanwhile, the RAF has to make do with what it can 'beg, steal or borrow' in the way of the existing NATO AWACS aircraft.

Friend — or foe?

Apart from Nimrod and the Foxhunter radar, the UKADGE system faces a number of other important defects. Because the UKADGE computers aren't yet installed or working, major stations like Boulmer in Northumbria are in danger and difficulty. For more than five years, Boulmer's operations room has been housed in a prefabricated building called BIF, protected from attack by a few inches of wood. They're very vulnerable. But until their underground bunker is open again, as a working part of UKADGE, there is nowhere else for them to go. Air Marshal Harding agrees that the delay is unwelcome; he 'will be a lot happier when it is all underground'.

But the time when RAF Boulmer can go back underground has been held up by computer software problems. First, the contracting companies argued about which computer they would choose, and then about which programming language. They found that some of the computers they received were incompatible with each other. All the computers are made to commercial, not military specifications, and are thought likely to be electronically 'knocked out' by any nuclear explosion.

> ***'In any real crisis RAF aircraft are simply not safe around British shores, being liable to be shot down by the RAF itself'***

Much of the UKADGE communications network is uninstalled, or delayed. And even some of the new communications systems create problems. Radio links between ground stations and NATO AWACS, a system called Link 11 is, according to RAF officers, 'very easily jammed' by the other side. Sometimes, they find they accidentally jam it themselves. The former Ministry of Defence Chief Scientific Adviser, Professor Sir Ronald Mason, told me last summer that 'you're highlighting quite rightly' important problems with UKADGE. But he still felt that it was 'in very good shape'.

But even when UKADGE and Britain's AWACS force *are* in operation, the government will have to face another billion-pound radar problem — the Identification of Friend or Foe, or IFF system. Like an old medieval watchkeeper, an IFF radar scanner electronically hails each passing aircraft, asking them if they be friend — or foe. A radar signal is sent back, and displayed to watching radar controllers.

But that's only in theory. IFF is old, and unreliable. It often produces wrong results, and can easily be made to produce false results. The Soviet Union knows exactly how it works, not because of a spy in the RAF, but because Britain officially sold them the whole system in the 1960s. Nowadays, even Aeroflot airliners carry IFF systems based on the RAF design.

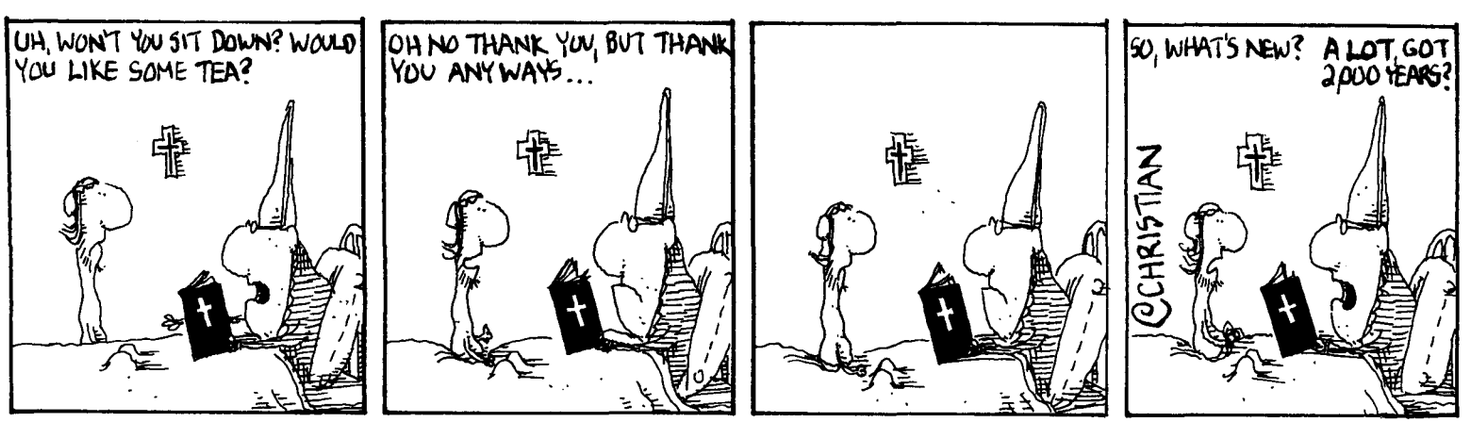
Because of this, in any real crisis, RAF aircraft are simply not safe around British shores, being liable to be shot down by the RAF itself. So NATO aircraft in these circumstances can only come or go from Britain by moving through special sanctuary zones — secret routes, not marked on any normal map, where missile controllers have been told not to fire at all. It's neither a comfortable nor an adequate system for pilots. The risks are real, too. After four years of secrecy, it was officially admitted a year ago that the deaths of four soldiers in the Falklands in 1982 had been caused by a British missile. Their Army helicopter had been misidentified through an IFF error, and then attacked and shot down by a Navy destroyer.

The House of Commons have been told that a new NATO Identification System will cost Britain at least 'hundreds of millions' of pounds. But NATO has yet to reach agreement about what standard to adopt, despite 15 years of argument. What's left at the moment is almost a 'shambles', according to Professor Mason:

> That would be too strong a word. But certainly our arrangements for IFF at the moment are far from valid. It certainly doesn't work.

So shooting down most of our own side would, in the heat of battle, 'be a real possibility'. That would be perhaps the most dramatic result of a series of major failures by contractors to meet RAF specifications, compounding earlier errors of official judgment about what might be required or achievable for Britain's air defences.

The RAF's willingness to advertise its myriad problems by leaking to the *Sunday Telegraph*, or by being relatively open before *Secret Society* cameras loudly testified to the authenticity of their concern. They face many big problems, and money to solve them is tight. But they are less prepared to face some of the obvious reasons for their difficulties. Money is tight most of all because of the Conservative exceptionally costly nuclear obsession with Trident. And the cutting edge of market forces fails utterly to work on contractors who have long thoroughly penetrated the upper echelons of Whitehall and the armed forces. Both these aspects of a British military-industrial complex are demonstrably inimical to the national interest. □


UH, WON'T YOU SIT DOWN? WOULD YOU LIKE SOME TEA?
OH NO THANK YOU, BUT THANK YOU ANYWAYS...
SO, WHAT'S NEW? A LOT, GOT 2,000 YEARS?
©CHRISTIAN

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ARTS

CINEMA

Internal exiles

Simon Cunliffe

Farewell (PG)
Camden Plaza
Living On The Edge
ICA, 29 May, one week only

SOVIET CINEMA'S prophet of *glasnost* has been in our midst recently. Newly elected as Secretary of the Soviet Filmmaker's Union in Moscow, Elem Klimov has presided over efforts to 'democratise' the Soviet film structure. He is a Gorbachev man ('some even say we are Gorbachev's cine-revolutionaries' — *Der Spiegel*) and has profited personally from the thaw. Last year saw the release in the West of the long-banned *Agony*. Earlier this year *Come And See* materialised. On this visit he leaves behind **Farewell**.

Like *Agony*, this film has taken some years to arrive. Based on the novel *Farewell to Matyora* by the Siberian Valentine Rasputin, it was devised and initiated by Larisa Shepitko, Klimov's wife. He took over as director when she was killed in a car crash in 1980.

It concerns the evacuation of a Siberian island village, Matyora — soon to be submerged by the lake formed as part of a hydro-electric power project. The islanders must leave behind their homes and their burial sites. The land, to which the traditions and memories of generations are inextricably linked, is to be sacrificed to the gods of progress; to the waters which will drive the generator turbines and propel the peasants of Matyora into the future. In the rubble-strewn surrounds of their new homes — cold-faced concrete condominiums — they will be compensated by the stark stare of electric lighting.

It is not hard to see why Klimov had trouble with *Farewell*. For the political significance of this elegiac parable is its affront to the country's heroic construction myths. The sympathy and compassion he invests in the peasants and their traditional allegiances flies in the face of socialist-realism's vocational duty. Here 'progress' is a faceless, uncaring monster represented by bureaucrats who take refuge in such smug, authoritarian rhetoric as: 'Why aren't our eyes at the back of the head instead of the front . . . So we can go forward, not backwards.'

But somewhat typically, in the context of its Western reception, the sharp edges of this film's political significance are dulled, leaving it ripe for a take-over bid by transcendent humanism and 'spirituality'; qualities apparently rare in our own film culture, yet so vigorously championed, chiefly by proponents of art-house cinema, in that of others.

Still, *Farewell* is beautifully made. Klimov musters a procession of finely realised images to substantiate the film's various discourses; that of *resistance* in the long drawn out shots of stubborn, uncomprehending, weather-creased faces; and in the eccentric behaviour of the island's residents, as restless as cattle rattled by an impending storm. In one long and memorable scene an old woman scrubs her home from top to bottom as a prelude to her departure.

Chasing off the Boy with the Tractor in Elem Klimov's *Farewell*

Communion with nature is another recurring theme. Sacred sites are identified — a place in the woods, a giant tree. Here the film becomes strikingly reminiscent of Japanese filmmaker Yanagimachi Mitsuo's *Fire Festival*. The weather steeps the proceedings in a kind of elemental soup — wind, rain and mists against which man-made fires periodically rage. Centuries-old homes are razed to the ground. Inanimate objects — a carefully stacked pile of wood which spontaneously collapses — join a chorus heralding chaos.

If there is much in *Farewell* that is fresh, there is also that which is familiar. A young boy who has not been taught to speak bears silent witness to events. And what self-respecting, rurally set, art-house movie would be complete without its village idiot?

This movie is finally about the dispossessed. People in the process of losing their homes, their traditions, their livelihoods; in some cases, their reasons for living. This much it shares with Mike Grigsby's **Living On The Edge**. If this remarkable documentary chooses its protagonists from among modern Britain's dispossessed, it restores to them one of the supposedly inalienable rights of citizens in this 'free', democratic society. A voice. The right to be heard.

Theirs are not the success stories our culture prizes so highly. Nor do their lives parade the spirituality which art so often contrives out of oppression and suffering. But the voices of a working-class farming family forced off their land after 40 years, of a family from the Ford Housing Estate in Birkenhead, of two mining families from the South Wales coalfields, echo with a rare and truthful eloquence. Unemployment 'is like a sentence without a crime', says one. 'In the '30s

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people had principles. Now they have mortgages and cars,' says another.

This is matched by, and contrasted with, Grigsby's deliberate, often beautiful, compositions — superbly photographed by Ivan Strasburg. Voice-over narration, archival footage, advertisements and a wide range of music are intercut to juxtapose the protagonists' past hopes and expectations with present-day realities. The trajectory is one of betrayal. Despair waits in the wings.

Made for Central Television, *Living On The Edge* is given theatrical distribution by the British Film Institute. Those responsible are to be congratulated for giving it the leg-up it needs in the face of competition from films like *Farewell*. For, as Judith Williamson once argued in this column, 'The "cry from the soul" . . . is easier to hear from Siberia than from just around the corner.' □

Judith Williamson is back from the USA next week.

MUSIC

Zealots on acid

Simon Reynolds

OVER IN AMERICA there's a clutch of groups (Big Black, Swans, Scratch Acid, Sonic Youth) who have perceived in rock an urge, not for celebration or liberation, but for abasement. What these groups do is subject the listener to a barrage of cacophanous texture and horrendous imagery; the effect of this concatenation of atrocity, psychosis and catastrophe is to make you feel like a victim, inert, vulnerable, reduced to the level of a *thing*. For some, this experience is one of enlightenment, a black revelation of existence; for others, the crumbling of the self in the face of horror, the sense of a *fall*, is a kind of psychedelic pleasure. Either way, it's hard to write about this kind of music without appearing either a masochist or a ghoulish voyeur.

In Britain this kind of musical practice tends to owe a lot to literary influences like Burroughs, Ballard, Rimbaud, Genet, above all Bataille and his belief in subversion through fascination with 'base material'. In America, it's much more instinctual; a revolt that's completely unthought out, which is both the logical culmination of rock'n'roll's rebel-without-a-cause attitude, *and* a contemporary reaction to yuppie culture's ideals of health and self-actualisation. (A parallel here with hip hop's radical politics of the slob — prime example, The Beastie Boys). Let it all hang out, *waste* your lives.

Butthole Surfers' new LP (indeed their whole existence) is a masterpiece of dedicated, almost selfless, self-abuse. *Locust Abortion Technician* (Blast First) starts, deceptively, with a slow fade-in of muzak so serenely antiseptic it is genuinely heavenly. Then, this dialogue: *Son* — 'Daddy?', *Father* — 'Yes, son?', *Son* — 'What does regret mean?', *Father* — 'Well, son — the funny thing about *regret* is that it is much better to regret something you *have* done than to regret something you haven't done.' (As close to a coherent manifesto as the Buttholes will ever get.) Then, *plunge*, in comes perhaps the most vertiginous and downered riff of all time, a straight steal from Black Sabbath's bleary, nauseous paean to dope, 'Sweet Leaf' — the same riff, incidentally, that the Beasties hijacked for 'Rhymin' and Stealin'. The rest of the record continues to dredge around the dreggy depths of the bass end of the sonic spectrum, using slowed-down tapes, fuzz, wah-wah, echo-box and recordings of cattle. *Locust Abortion Technician* is a glorious mire, a palace of ordure.

The final track is the finest. '22 Going On 23' juxtaposes fragments from a radio phone-in (a girl talks of being sexually assaulted) with the most gnarled and menacing riff in the history of recorded sound. In a creased voice she speaks of recurring nightmares, of being told by her therapist to try putting endings on them where she comes out a winner, of her continual failure, and here you wonder whether the Buttholes are practising a dodgy kind of voyeuristic exploitation. And then the guitar soars in a vast crystalline arc that's so devastated and so *compassionate*, all is redeemed, and you realise that Butthole Surfers' sense of despair and horror borders on the religious.

Public Enemy have been called 'the Black Panthers of rap'. The Black Panthers' strategy was to take the fact of black male street criminality and try to politicise it; Public Enemy seem to be trying to achieve a similar channeling of hip hop nastiness. They want to supplant the 'cold gettin' dumb'/mindblown apathy that is hip hop's current hip stance, and divert its aggression into the project of agitation, education and organisation. Normally I loathe this kind of scoutmaster attitude, and I'm also disturbed by the strains of misogyny and homophobia in their ideas (their leader, Chuck D, said in *Melody Maker*: 'It's okay for whites . . . but we can't afford to have fags in our race. Breaks down the race'). But, *but*, the LP, *'Yo! Bum Rush The Show'* (Def Jam/CBS) is unbelievably good — a dense and intricate grid of grungy rock riffs, chopped-up soul shrieks and grunts, delirious scratch, deliberate piano notes, white noise and tons and tons of empty space. At times, it's positively avant-garde: 'Public Enemy No. 1' manages to make a single sustained note on a bass moog, that just goes on and on, into the funkiest thing you ever heard in your life.

Arthur Russell is an avant-garde musician from New York who has spent the last decade exploring the minimalist possibilities of disco repetition, the result being a series of warped dancefloor classics recorded under various pseudonyms (Dinosaur L, Indian Ocean, Lola). *The World Of Echo* (Rough Trade) expands Russell's obsession with the subaquatic: cello, hand-percussion and echoes are used to make a music of currents and updrafts, in which sounds shimmer, dart and vanish like shoals of exotic fish. Russell sings meandering, rapturous melodies in a hushed and bleary mumble, sounds drugged with a fabulous, obscure desire or pain; his voice moves around in some indefinite region between languour and languishing. The only comparison I can think of is John Martyn's jazziest and most out-of-it moments on *Solid Air*. Unfathomable beauty.

A similar baffled verdict goes for **Happy Mondays** and their debut LP (deep breath) *Squirrel and G-Man Twenty Four Hour Party People Plastic Face Carnt Smile (White Out)* (Factory). (The awkward little gits.) What they've done is take the brisk minimalism of 1970s funk and play it with the glacial ferocity of The Velvet Underground or The Fall, taken the warm insistence of disco and chilled it to the marrow. The sound is crystalline, magical, almost inhuman. The only trace of flesh and dirt is the ugly rasp of singer Shaun Ryder, spewing out his cryptic lyrics. I suspect hallucinogens have played their part in the birth of this dazzling and inscrutable beauty. Words fail me . . . which is always a good feeling, a good place to be. □

TELEVISION

Arm in Armalite

Hugo Williams

BRITISH TV FILMS about the Irish situation are beginning to be discernible as a cinematic sub-genre not unlike Hollywood's guilt-ridden, accusatory *films noirs* of the Fifties, shot mostly at night, starring Alan Ladd. Overtly about adultery, greed and murder, those were covertly about the Cold War. A Troubles film will similarly *not* concern itself with knee-capping or indiscriminate nail-bombing, unless it is *contributing* something on a psychological level. That would be too exploitative for our socially-aware telle-hacks.

No, a Troubles show must appear to be caring by drumming up some meaty psychological stuff from the home front, along the time-hallowed lines of tabloidery. Incest, religion and wife-beating are standard. These can be brought out of the closet and onto the couch with the help of the other essential ingredient of a good Troubles scam: alcoholism, used as both cause and effect of anything else that comes to mind. 'So how's about that drink instead,' says a failed IRA seducer in **Lost Belongings** (ITV). 'It's the Irishman's traditional substitute, after all.'

Generally speaking, a blonde Protestant schoolgirl will go for a joy ride with a Catholic rock musician in his group's van. He'll show her a home-made bomb or a home-made johnny and they'll go to bed like tigers on the floor of some squat with its references hanging out like flags and a poster of David Bowie to cut to. It's all very innocent until the sick older generation put in their oar. The older generation aren't like you and me: they're *totally* fucked up. They get off on bullets entering flesh and under-age sex with policemen. They're going to put a stop to all this young love and birth control if they have to resort to blackmail, kidnapping and torture. They're going to put the plot back on a war footing if it kills everyone. Recognise the scenario? The only surprising thing is that they haven't yet done a *Bogside Story*, with music by The Pogues.

Personally I think it's time they dropped the tiresome sociological foreplay with its crass Freudian insights and got down to some decent action; which is more expensive, of course. It's too late for John Ford, but think what a glorious time Francis Ford Apocalypse would have if he was allowed to spend ten billion laying waste Belfast. A task force of West Coast producers, subsidised by the BFI, could be invited to sign up known IRA and UDR crazies to play themselves in low budget 'Sectarians' for TV, much as early Hollywood

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moguls mopped up the hordes of out-of-work cowboys to make the early 'Westerns'. The recent holocaust at Loughall, with the mechanical digger lumbering down the deserted high street and the single 'innocent bystander' wandering into the ambush we know is waiting was a terrible waste of cinematic potential and talent, let alone life. (Perhaps the Australian film industry would have a more virile approach to the subject: they understand better the sort of part women would be expected to play in a good blood-letter.)

Lost Belongings, labelled NEW in white-on-black in *TV Times*, belongs to the category of prolonged psychological diagnosis justifying minimal political mayhem. It's so wide-ranging you don't know where to start. Almost anything could happen and still be counted significant in terms of Ireland today. Watching it, you get the feeling you're watching everything there is on television simultaneously.

The first story is about a mature, blonde schoolgirl's desire for a drunk showband drummer of the opposite religion: 'Y' see, our Niall is kinky for Protestant grammar school girls.' Meanwhile, 'her jealous and possessive uncle has other plans as he rushes to the quay to stop them . . .' Is the uncle politically or sexually motivated? you ask. Ah, that's the beauty of this sort of thing: the sickness is so deep-rooted it's impossible to say. Really, it's sort of mutual, if I get the message right.

The latest in the series, *The American Friend*, was even better. Teddy (army) and Simon (press) are on holiday in a croft on the Irish border. Teddy, 'playing some kind of screwball undercover game', drunkenly insults the locals to prime a trap. An American archaeologist zooms up on her Triumph and takes Simon off to an island, where a statue 'is holding open its vagina to reveal the genitalia' — as indeed is she, though their coupling looks more like a jeans ad. Teddy has teamed up with Provo mole McBraill, who also tries to 'recruit' the archaeologist. 'There are no informers at my level,' he tells her. 'There's a certain trade-off of information between sides, that's all. I'm building a *programme* for the *people*.' He is naturally smeared across a windscreen on a dark road, the statutory bit of violence for the credits to roll across.

Another seriously psychological case history from Ireland opened another NEW series last week, **When Reason Sleeps** (C4). This violent little number about the sins of the father would have been a normal slice of post-*Psycho* special-effects if it hadn't been for references to 'provos' 'republicans' and the 'fucking army'. There's a woman being beaten up by her drunk husband while their son watches and hides in terror. Father hears him and puts him in the coal-hole. Twenty years later he gets out of prison still drunk and comes to watch his son's showband. The son chucks a cymbal at him. In *Psycho 5* it cuts off his head. Here it misses, so the young man, his girlfriend and a friend steal a car to do a job on a deserted house which is really the inside of the poor chap's past. While he is inside himself, meeting himself as a small boy with the aid of a flashlight, his friend is outside inside his girlfriend in the car. The boy-man stumbles around seeing things that aren't there and trying to steal some silver, then he pushes himself downstairs. End of story. Beginning of chin-stroking. □

WORK IN PROGRESS

Abracadabra blues

Naseem Khan

THE MAGIC CIRCLE recently balloted its members. Did they, it asked, 'wish to change the rules of the Magic Circle so as to admit ladies?' No, they answered.

Mark you, the margin was less than some had predicted: of the 53.6 per cent of the Circle's 1,492 members to reply, a mere 57 per cent voted against. People inside the Magic Circle say that the writing is on the wall, the time has got to come, etc, and probably a good thing too. However, speculated my source, there were probably only a couple of dozen women throughout the country of a good enough standard to get in.

The dearth of women magicians and their alleged lower competence will, of course, ring all sorts of bells with feminists. (At least the Magic Circle is now embarrassed by its original claim that women can't belong 'because they can't keep secrets'.) Why *are* there fewer women in magic? Is it merely the lack of a Circle seal of approval that keeps them out? Or is it that, at a deep level, people expect their magicians (shades of Merlin and Gandalf) to be male?

The women magicians I spoke to were remarkably unconcerned about the Magic Circle veto. 'The Magic Circle is to magic what El Vino's is to journalism,' said one. 'It's hardly a priority in my life,' declared another. The truth is, said both, the un-magic lay world gets the Magic Circle wrong. It is not a validating body for magic. It is not a professional or negotiating body. It is simply a club, formed in 1905, for men who are hooked on magic — very few of whom are even currently working magicians (around ten per cent, confirmed a spokesman, who proferred the same uninflated view of the Circle as had the women). They get together for regular club nights in which they talk about, lecture on or demonstrate magic; their library is reportedly excellent; but seal of quality, or key to a door, they are not. Women may not get far in magic, says Fay Presto, one of the few whose example contradicts that fact, 'but it has nothing whatsoever to do with the fact that the Magic Circle does not admit women.'

Presto herself would challenge the terms of the question. It is more, she says, than magic alone. 'How many women impressionists are there? Jugglers? Stand-up comedians?' The problem covers a wide spectrum of entertainment, she considers, not just the land of the magic cane and the white rabbit, with 'complex socio-economic reasons' at the root. Rosy Gibb — winner of the magic section in *Time Out*'s last Street Entertainers of the Year competition — is less qualified in her response. 'As a women I'm taken less seriously than men. People expect their magicians to be men in the same way that they will choose to go to a man dentist or a man mechanic.' Claims like these are always hard to substantiate, but Gibb's experience after the award will certainly raise questions. Previous male winners have found it a passport to professional progress. She has had three engagements since winning.

Presto believes that the issue is more complex. 'It's so much easier to say, "I'm a woman and they're not taking me seriously,"' she said, in her wonderfully gravelly voice. 'That's two and a half out of ten, in my view. I have a feeling it's because you're not doing your homework.' 'Homework' for Presto means style. It's tea at the Savoy and fishnet tights and glamour. ('There is an old saying in management, "You'll always be accepted at the level at which you're first introduced"'.) It's prestigious gigs — yachts in Cannes — and costly costumes. 'I may not be taken seriously by the Magic Circle or the magic fraternity, but I'm taken seriously by my clients — £500-worth seriously.'

This is all a far cry from the council estate in North London where Presto lives, but, she reckons, the kind of survival tactic you need in a world based, as showbiz is, on glamour. 'Yes, I am selling glamour. That's what people buy.' Safe and unthreatening as her image is for the male world of magic, it still hasn't protected Presto, though hers is a special case. A man till a few years back, her success has inevitably been attributed by critics to the notoriety of her sex change. 'At least,' she said bitterly, 'they can't say it's all due to the casting couch.' Ironically, till she changed, she was welcome at the Magic Circle. Afterwards, the door closed.

Theoretically the world of magic ought to be teeming with women. After all, it's a traditional female profession, going back to witches. Or is there something intrinsically conservative in the whole idea of the practice of magic? Thoughts like this are likely to arise if you've had a dose of Ian Saville, the Socialist Magician. Once a conventional magician — or so he disarmingly explains in his one-man show — his act was full of traditional mystification and bourgeois frills. But divine visitation — courtesy of Berthold. Brecht — opened his eyes to the need to place magic at the service of socialist-realism. No more the mage-like role, the mysterious infallibility. On comes the magician who will demystify magic (or says he will) and, what's more, do socially-conscious tricks: the Theory of Surplus Value demonstrated by little boxes, the road to a classless society illustrated via the rope trick.

The three gods from Brecht's *Good Woman of Szechuan* keep an eye on Saville, and the dummy of Brecht pops up to give him tips on how to put socialist content into his tricks. Can he succeed? Is there such a thing as Socialist Magic or must it really be all satin capes or fishnet tights? See Saville and find out.

After his act, he announces proudly, audiences are wont to rush out: 'They immediately want to get up and change the world.' Nobody showed the least signs of wanting to rush out when I saw him, for whatever reasons. I think they were too busy laughing. □

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PHOTOGRAPHY

Collage graduates

Liz Heron

In A Right State: Photo-constructions
GRAHAM BUDGETT, JOHN HEARTFIELD, PETER KENNARD *Camerawork*

IS PRESENT-DAY SATIRICAL photomontage or photo-construction the residue of a heroic, but dead, Left Modernism? asks David Evans in the catalogue of Camerawork's current show. It's a rhetorical challenge to the postmodernist critiques he believes now endanger the tradition pioneered by John Heartfield. *In a Right State: Photo-constructions* spells out no conclusive answer, but, with an election looming, Evans' question strikes a timely note.

Photomontage has been with us since the dawn of photography, but it was the Berlin Dadaists who invented it as a form, whose overt manipulations created an anti-art of provocations.

Among their experiments with collage and typography Dawn Ades cites the first dated example of photomontage as the cover of an illustrated paper in 1919, its parodically humorous cut-up credited to Heartfield and George Grosz. By the time Heartfield had developed his agit-prop techniques for *AIZ* and other anti-Nazi publications, montage was a widespread tool. Its applications multiplied across the modern movements, while its formal possibilities have increased with technological refinement. It's now a commonplace, of advertising and *Private Eye* covers.

Simply to reclaim Heartfield's methods and motifs after half a century of changes in visual perception would be nearly as foolish as denying the still combative potential of photomontage to expose contradictions in political ideology. The billboards teem with imagery that not only demands sophistication from the onlooker, but works because of that expectation. Advertisers have long understood the seductions of the cryptic, and the ways identification with a product or a lifestyle can be achieved through cultural complicity; despite ourselves we collude.

Left propagandists in Britain have been slow to catch on, falling prey to the style monitors. There have been exceptions: the GLC campaigns did win hearts and minds (for what that was worth) and the words and pictures worked without the kind of slick vacuity that some of the latest left-wing PR risks through its growing mania with style for style's sake.

Style for style's sake, marketing references emptied of meaning — all part of postmodernity's visual landscape. The Levis commercials supremely exemplify this textual symbiosis. Carlsberg picked up humorously on the Levis Fifties pastiche; Levis picked up on the film *Stand By Me*, which itself spins off the hit record revival and the Levis ad. Each scores on audience recognition alone.

Recognition is all you need for a successful visual pun, and the current *Today* ad campaign can be judged on target. The ads don't actually tell us anything — they just allude to the issues that make current news — yet, because the photomontages are clever and rather grotesquely amusing, they prompt admiration and interest in what they're selling.

Even if the mechanisms of advertising do have to be reckoned with, they needn't reproduce the same superficiality. By neglecting any significance but 'image projection', designer politics succumbs to an unnecessary fatalism. But crude messages won't do either, because we now take for granted a certain level of humour, irony, and rhetorical sparring — and because it is not only Tory policies and their devastating effects that need to be attacked, but the Medusa-like fascination Thatcher exerts through her seemingly invulnerable sense of her own power. John Heartfield can still teach us a few lessons here.

Heartfield's 'rediscovery' during the 1970s left photography boom led to a spate of new work, some interesting, some worthily dull. Heartfield went in for visual puns, irony and a brilliant undercutting of right-wing rhetoric (whose best known example is probably 'Millions stand behind me!' which created an entirely new meaning for Hitler's slogan), but his were clear political messages and it was all in deadly earnest. The very British tendency to didacticism meant that much of the Heartfield-influenced work missed out on Heartfield's dialectic and settled for the earnestness.

Klaus Staeck has observed that 'the Germans are not really talented when it comes to irony, they don't always understand the point', but it hasn't stopped him from working on them, and with a high level of visibility. He and Hans Haacke are perhaps the foremost exemplars of the revitalised Heartfield militancy. Haacke has worked here with Anti-Apartheid; Staeck's 'For wider streets Vote Conservative' was done here as a postcard in 1974. It's typical of his carefully worked out simplicity; my favourite is the right-wing parody 'German Workers! The SPD will take away your villas in Ticino'.

There are some of Heartfield's originals in the Camerawork show. It's hard now to imagine the power they must have had as covers on a high circulation magazine. It's also hard to see why Peter Kennard has turned his back on the specific contexts of the work he has on show here and opted for an installation: a Greenham-style fence on which the montages (without their text) are tied with blue ribbon. The effect is of a grim memorial to Thatcher's Britain, a frieze of derelict factories, hospitals closed, riot police and bank notes among the nuclear warheads and grinning deathsheads: his last few years' work turned into an elegy.

'A Brief US History', Graham Budgett's glossy colour series, is luridly intriguing, using familiar US icons to draw the viewer in but without any clear meaning until you read the longish text, which is at times both witty and shocking. But it too comes after the event. We are indeed in a Right State. What's needed now is fast and furious agit-prop that is both serious and funny, that startles, shocks and shows up the vicious indifference of our rulers in a way that melts the nation's numbness and makes it all finally intolerable. We need the savagery that Steve Bell has used to undercut their 'public image', and we need a merciless subtlety too. We need style *and* meaning. □

THEATRE

Cuban heels

Victoria Radin

Worlds Apart
JOSE TRIANA *adpt.* PETER WHELAN *The Pit*
Dog Lady and **The Cuban Swimmer**
MILCHA SANCHEZ-SCOTT *The Gate*

CUBA REMAINED the stepchild of Spain for much longer than the other Spanish-American countries and its temperament is more exclusively Spanish. Nick Hamm's production of the Cuban exile Jose Triana's **Worlds Apart** most marvellously and enlighteningly captures Cuba's particular quality: a blend of cruel humour, enraged temperament, exaggerated machismo and a predilection for the dreamily anecdotal.

In the late 1960s Triana had world-wide success with *The Criminals* (performed here by the RSC): it was an allegory of authoritarianism and his reward was the banning of his works and his conscription into manual labour. Originally an advocate of Castro's revolution — he still calls himself a socialist — he finally found exile in France in 1980. *Worlds Apart* was begun in Havana and finished in Paris.

It is in some ways a bitter work but the author's disgust is directed primarily at what he sees as the insane code of sexual honour that dishonours and deforms both men and women, but especially women. The play is set between the years 1894 and 1914, a period during which Cuba was rent first by wars of independence against Spain and then by US dominion. The centre of this elusive — at times maddeningly so — family drama is Victoria, younger daughter of a wealthy sugar plantation-owning family. Her father is a liberal whose instincts favour the revolutionaries; her mother a fearful upholder of convention who talks her husband into remaining neutral.

Casualties of the rigid system of *honradez* ('honour') abound. The women take their identity wholly from their men: when the son of the family friend, a widow, runs away to fight, Juanita sees herself as abandoned and helpless, with little interest in her daughter. We watch Victoria's sister, Alicia, waste away during the course of the evening from the 'prostitutes' disease' which she contracted from her husband, a brute who runs a brothel and was surely, as Victoria's husband is to be, the fruit of an arranged marriage. He speaks of their honeymoon as a *'carnival d'amour'* but, as the truth sadly emerges, Alicia is frigid.

We watch Victoria's coming to womanhood through a series of wonderfully imagined, and sparklingly played, set pieces. Seated on the ground with a piece of sewing, the girls talk about menstruation and sex: Victoria's utter horror at the revelation of the facts of life is contrasted with the acceptance of her friend ('That's the way it is. Grown ups. Cats. Dogs. Chickens. Lizards'). It is extremely acute of Triana later to show her fear of sex in general and lack of real attraction to her parentally-chosen fiancé Joachim propelling her instinctively to the behaviour of a coquette. Once married to him, their sexual life, as it emerges in a

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remarkably-written scene brilliantly played by David Haig and Janet McTeer, is a total flop. But when Victoria takes a lover she ultimately repulses him by her passion. She returns to her husband and the play ends, as it began, with her perception of herself as 'an honest woman, shadow of a shadow'.

Before she goes to New York, Victoria bids goodbye to her 'orchard'. This is, I suppose, Cuban Chekov — more elliptical, diffuse and far less characterised than the Russian playwright, but still displaying a similar sense of the appalling ties that bind families together and those individual disappointments and egotisms that render them alien and cruel. There are other affinities: Cuba's slaves, like the serfs, had recently been freed, but these Afro-Cuban servants are black and Triana offers a fascinating sidelight on that culture, with its separation of the higher (more acceptable, and therefore wealthier) caste of mulattos.

Janet McTeer confirms again for me her quality of bold originality: where other British actresses need a tiny pause before they reach an emotion, McTeer is there in a flash, as the gun is sounding. She has a rare gift of emotional accessibility. The rest of the cast, who include David Killick and Darlene Johnson as her parents, Anna Patrick as her maimed sister and Rosalin Boxall as her most unpleasantly psychically disfigured aunt, are excellent; on Chris Dyer's very handsome and nearly bare two-tiered beige-coloured set, Nick Hamm's direction is particularly good on that difficult area of scenes of group revelry and extracts somehow from these British actors a fluid and explosive sense of the Hispanic New World.

The two short plays at the Gate are set in present-day California among the community of Cuban immigrants. Micha Sanchez-Scott, their young author, apparently lived everywhere in the world before coming to the USA as a child, but her knowledge of the Cuban community in exile seems detailed and deep. The two pieces are family plays, centred on the self-realisation of a young woman. In **Dog Lady**, Rosalinda competes in the Our Lady of the Thousand Saviours Marathon. With the aid of a little Santeria — the Cuban religion of Catholicism crossed with voodoo — practised by a neighbour, she wins the prize of a trip to Rome. In **The Cuban Swimmer**, young Margarita wins an aqueous marathon with the aid of sheer bloody-mindedness. Her father and coach, who himself can't swim at all, pushes her into what seems like drowning but Margarita wins after she's swum away from her family on their boat.

This father is certainly a descendant of Triana's peacock men; and Sanchez-Scott's intermingling of dreaminess with a rooted social world, all the while sketching in odd, unexpected detail, has much of a character I will now recognise as Cuban. Christa van Raalte's direction on Jane Green's witty set (a washing line of blue clothes to suggest the sea-sky) captures it all beautifully; Helen Keen, Sheila Burrell, Joseph Long, Diana Brooks and, particularly, Giselle Glasman as both the heroines create brief, authentic characters. The plays won several prizes off-Broadway, where they were performed by the Hispanic theatre company INTAR. I wait expectantly for my neighbours, the burgeoning Spanish population of London, to issue forth on our stages (and in our literature). □

Books

LESBIAN/GAY

Not all cider with Bosie

Peter Robins

The first formal gathering of lesbian and gay writers living in Europe took place recently in London; a member of the organising committee assesses the problems and achievements

IN CHILDHOOD we were told — and later read — stories of castaways on desert islands who wrote messages that were popped into bottles and then thrown into the surrounding waters. The assumption was that someone, somewhere would (and usually did) read the message and stage a rescue operation. With some such optimism, a cluster of poets, novelists and editors formed themselves — a trifle unwillingly — into the committee for Symposium 87. A year ago we devised a first press release addressed to such lesbian and gay magazines, organisations and radio stations as we knew of in mainland Europe. We invited writers — and we included biographers, translators and critics, for they, too, do work creatively — to join us in London to examine the common problems we face in the late 20th century and to consider how best we can help each other in solving those problems.

We had no assurance that there would be any response. Who, having read the message in the bottle (and that, in itself, presumed some understanding of English), would feel it worthwhile putting aside some work in progress, sending 25 pounds in sterling and making the long, sometimes costly, journey to London? A favourite figure during those planning months was a young, back-packing lesbian poet from Malmo. What would be in it for her? She provided a necessary corrective to insular thinking. Would a workshop on The Social Context In Which We Write (unemployment and poverty) interest her in the slightest? Were we doing everything to involve visitors in an event which would be conducted, almost entirely, in a language not their own? In brief, how could we ensure that Symposium 87 would not be dominated by Brits, not only numerically and linguistically, but also by the themes selected?

This was really the central issue. Having decided to organise a gathering for writers working in cultures other than our own, we had constantly to remind ourselves that Anglo-American perspectives are not the only ones.

Responses to our invitation varied. From the French writer, Yves Navarre, we received a crisp note. 'I am gay. I am a writer. I am not a gay writer.' This was construed by some as the old fallacy of the undistributed middle and, inevitably, formed the basis for a discussion that's been rehearsed before and will, no doubt, be revived at Symposium 88 in the Netherlands. From Italy, where spring is kinder and earlier than in Britain (and where writers are seldom affluent) came the laconic message ' . . . but London is *so* cold'. Understandably, yet it firmed our determination, as organisers, to ensure that the weekend should begin with a reception that might bust the budget but would prove, for all time, we Brits would not be playing post-imperialists graciously receiving funny little scribblers from beyond Dover.

In this and in most of our intentions, Symposium 87 was a success. I was nearly ejected when I attempted to bring a workshop on drama (convened by Martin Sherman) to a close. The Danish novelist and poet Bente Clod, speaking of the difficulties encountered by lesbian writers in Scandinavia, fired her audience of 80 men and women to prolonged applause. She, among others, encouraged participants to remember that, despite their necessary isolation as writers, they would never, after such a gathering, feel totally alone whatever the various official pressures on them.

Had there been a pollster hanging around at the opening of the Symposium, eager to ask what individual writers expected of such a weekend, it is probable that the 'Don't Knows' would have topped any result. Had the same pollster probed a little, asked what dream any writer had brought to London, the responses would probably have been more concrete and varied. The chance to meet a translator who would help bring a wider audience; the opportunity to contribute to a Euro-anthology; the opportunity to voice a strongly held view on the writer's responsibilities in the Age of Aids. Many of these dreams were realised for, inevitably, Symposium 87 was more than the timetable. There were discussions in corridors, over lunch and in nearby bars. New friendships (why pretend otherwise?) began at parties. Lesbian and gay writers are certainly as human as delegates to any party political conference. Yet, as I told one radio interviewer, I heard of no orgies. Nothing that would bring a blush to the cheek of Mary Whitehouse — except the very concept of such a gathering. The informal get-togethers weren't all Cider with Bosie.

So, was it all *Arcadia Rules OK* from Martyn Goff's keynote speech till the Monday afternoon goodbyes? There were occasional problems. What should one expect when women and men from cultures as diverse as Yugoslavia and the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden, meet? A poet from Amsterdam, giving a survey of the history of gay writing in his country, mentioned that it had to include a tradition of writing about (not advocating) boy-love. By Monday he had finally convinced those lesbians he had upset that he had not made a trip to London to promote paedophilia. To have refused to listen to him would have been illogical since, a few hours later, a session on censorship was to be convened, led by the British MP Chris Smith.

Above all, the Symposium was an opportunity to listen and to learn. Our visitors this Easter were not amateurs with half a sonnet completed or boasting only that sad intention to write if there

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Aimed at the under-30s (to judge by Julie Hollings' illustrations), Dave Clarke's MODERN ART: A GRAPHIC GUIDE (Camden Press, £4.95) explains very briefly and simply why art can be abstract, cubist, expressionist, surrealist, etc, without necessarily being a con. Particularly good on Mondrian, but comes no nearer to our own time than Jackson Pollock, who would be grandfather age by now, so it's 'modern' art only in the art-historical sense. The cartoon illustrations are deliberately crude and conventional, graphically conveying such crude and conventional views of modern art as 'A child of five could do it!' or 'I've done it! It looks like . . . *nothing at all*!' (John Spurling)

wasn't so much living to do. They were performed dramatists and published novelists from countries where conditions are often less propitious than our own for writers whose vision dissents from the prevailing norm.

From the outset there was a widespread determination that Symposium 87 should not be a one-off event, receding during the summer months to a pleasant memory. The Association of Lesbian and Gay Writers has been formed. One of its first acts was to deplore the proposed dismissal of two journalists — one lesbian and one gay — from the *New Statesman*. More broadly, the aim will be to establish a supportive network for serious lesbian and gay writers throughout the continent, serving their particular needs more than any national Writers' Union can.

Already there's news from the Netherlands that next year's Symposium will focus more closely on a Festival of Writing. That is fine. It is their choice. London can be proud of doing the pioneering work. In whatever is constructed from our modest beginning, Britain's lesbian and gay writers will expect to play an integral but not dominant role. □

Peter Robins' latest collection of stories, Summer Shorts, *has just been published by Third House.*

BIOGRAPHY

Splendid revolutionary

Norman Geras

Rosa Luxemburg: A Life
ELZBIETA ETTINGER *Harrap* £10.95

ROSA LUXEMBURG'S WAS A strong, clear voice in the cause of socialism. Combative and humane, engaging and deeply engaged, it has carried an appeal for readers both yesterday and today. It combined what many too easily disjoin — revolutionary commitment and democratic principle — elaborating a distinctive Marxist view of socialist revolution and democracy as lengthy, difficult, self-educative processes of proletarian agency, painfully marked by unavoidable error and defeat.

Luxemburg was active in three socialist movements and familiar with the affairs of more, a prominent contributor to theoretical and tactical debates stretching over two decades. The substance of her ideas, the wholehearted activity of her life and brave and brutal manner of her death give reason enough for the interest there continues to be in her person.

This new biography comes already provided with commendations on its jacket and it deserves them. It is a superb account of an exceptional life, incorporating the results of fresh research and told with an admirable balance of sympathy and critical detachment. Of course, no sharp separation of the public from the personal is possible in Luxemburg's case, and her ideas are duly summarised and her main political activities recounted. But it is the personal life, caught or refracted in a vast, energetic correspondence, that is Elzbieta Ettinger's explicit focus of interest, and her book's few faults, minor beside its many strengths and overall achievement, are in a way related to that.

She describes the conflicts and paradoxes of Luxemburg's life and explores what she calls 'the contradictions of her nature'. The author has a mature and perceptive eye for the indicative detail, weakness or virtue: for the overdramatised phrase, mood of helplessness or desperation, turn or play of passion — now generous, now too stifling to its objects — undercurrent of courage and resolve; for everything in fact making up the depth of lived out time and circumstance, the intricacy of close relationships as they evolve. Luxemburg wanted a full and vigorous existence, strong, intimate ties of friendship, always love; and 'serenity and harmony', for which, she said, everything in her cried out. Periods of public success and overt fulfilment masked a loneliness within. She needed 'life' and reflected much on the art of living; insisted on her 'right to personal happiness'; long wanted a child and dreamed of an orderly family home. With the too orderly ambience of German Social Democracy in mind, she wrote from Warsaw after the stormy mass struggles of 1905: 'The revolution is splendid, everything else is rubbish.'

Ettinger reconstructs the shape and quality of a life with care and imagination. Large matters: a pogrom experienced, an 'unwanted Jewish heritage', an adored and revered child ('you alone will make our family's name famous') who had not enough time to give to her dying parents, and their suffering and her grief from that. Small matters: Luxemburg's attitudes to her maid, her cat, entertaining; or her way with money. And all the rest, testimony to the energy and fortitude of her: a duty of reaching deep into herself whenever writing; her strength as an orator and creativity as a teacher; her many, many letters, sentimental, searingly open, modulated to the mood and particular recipient, full to bursting; her several imprisonments and her changing 'senses' of them — once a confident defiance, later a tired, desolate longing for the world and friends. The ups and downs of valued friendships with other women — Luise Kautsky, Clara Zetkin, Mathilde Jacob — and of ardent — sometimes, as with Clara's son Konstantin, nearly smothering — relationships with younger men are here all described.

The central thread winding through the whole story is Luxemburg's relationship with Leo Jogiches. Not the least considerable virtue of this book, indeed, is the vivid portrait it gives us of him, able organiser and mentor to numbers of young revolutionaries, secretive and emotionally

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closed, here competent and tyrannical, there inert with failure and self-doubt; finally awaiting a certain and terrible death in Berlin in order to uncover the truth about Luxemburg's murder. Ettinger shows the complexity of this entanglement, two strongly independent beings immensely dependent on one another in creative and destructive ways: she needing from him a kind of love he could not give, and the consequent break-up of their intimacy (not occasioned, as some have claimed, by infidelity on Jogiches' part); an understanding each of the other that no one else had or could make good; at length, a form of reconciliation and mutual support, loyalty and tolerance to the end. It is a moving and, all in all, fine interpersonal history.

Two reservations are in order. Ettinger refrains from any extended analysis of Luxemburg's ideas but not from offering judgments about them, some of which are unbalanced. She is entitled to her viewpoints, naturally, but only more detailed argument could show whether they were well founded. Luxemburg's criticisms of Lenin, the ethical dimension of her thought, her views about force and armed insurrection are all one-sidedly put here. There is some tendency, secondly, to a sort of biographical reductionism that moves too quickly from the emotional to the political life: as in the suggestion that it was no coincidence that Luxemburg's break with Kautsky and argument with Bebel (over socialist strategy and militarism respectively) occurred at the same time as an inner turmoil. These were issues of massive historical import and, whatever passions Luxemburg may have fed into disputing them, she could not have done significantly otherwise in *any* emotional state.

No precursor of contemporary feminism, Luxemburg was an extraordinary, courageous and admirable woman. The achievement of this biography is to have conveyed it perhaps better than any previous work. □

Norman Geras is the author of The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg. *This and his most recent book,* Literature of Revolution, *are published by Verso.*

POETRY

Wings and a prayer

Margaret Mulvihill

A Captive Lion: the Life of Marina Tsvetayeva
ELAINE FEINSTEIN *Hutchinson* £15.95
Selected Poems of Marina Tsvetayeva
ed. ELAINE FEINSTEIN *Hutchinson* £6.95

IN THE SUMMER of 1910 Marina Tsvetayeva rubbed a solution containing hydrogen peroxide into her hair to make it grow more quickly. The resulting, disgracefully yellow, scalp had to be shaved off, so that when the critic and literary broker Max Voloshin called to pay his respects he was met by a schoolgirl in a skull-cap. Might he remove the cap to feel for phrenological clues to her precocity as a poet? The 18-year-old 'agreed at once, without demur' and Voloshin decided that the bumps on her head resembled those of a 'Roman seminarist'.

Marina Tsvetayeva often acted as though she had no bumps at all in her head. Within two years she had married a huge-eyed disaster named Sergei Efron, usually, and significantly, known by his childish diminutive of Seryozha. Her vow to this born loser led her into a life of barely credible hardship, which she ended by hanging herself in 1941. But, as her biographer champion points out, it was not Marina's habit to analyse the natures of those she elected to love.

What Feinstein charitably calls a sense of 'loyalty to his fellow-officers' — and probably another one of revenge on parents who had served earlier revolutionary initiatives at his expense — made a White Guard of Seryozha. His wife called White Guardism her '*voluntary* cross'. After the Civil War, during which her second daughter died of starvation, she followed him into exile: 'And this was Hagar's grief. To be/Sent far away. Even with her child.'

By 1937 the adaptable Seryozha was a Soviet agent in Paris, implicated in the murder of NKVD defector 'Ignace Reiss'. When the French police questioned Madame Efron about her husand's activities she came across as so clueless that they doubted her sanity. But she duly followed her Seryozha back into the jaws of Stalin's Russia.

This was the Marina who was easy to mock. According to Ehrenburg: 'In what is known as politics, Tsvetayeva was guileless, obstinate and sincere.' Before leaving Moscow she asked Mayakovsky what she should say to people abroad and he told her, 'That the truth — is here.' The only truth she recognised then was a romantic version of her husband's adventure. But neither did she retreat into an art-for-art's-sake distance from painful realities. Instead she insisted on a continuing status as the peer of Mandelstam, Akhmatova and Pasternak, and an almost eccentric vocation as a 'citizen of poetry'. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s she maintained a fellowship with poets working in her own tongue at home and abroad, and that made her non-kosher with the Paris émigrés: 'Here I am unwanted, and there I am *impossible*.'

For Tsvetayeva the 'condition of creation' was a trance-state, during which, by 'obeying an unknown necessity, you set fire to a house or push your friends down from a mountain top'. She survived her martyrdom until 1941 by keeping faith with this dreaming ego against brutal odds. While Virginia was considering *A Room of One's Own*, Marina was anchored by two children and a tubercular boy-husband. She skinned rabbits and stoked stoves by day, clearing the kitchen table before dawn to reclaim that unknown necessity: 'I have only ever been myself (my soul) in my notebooks and on solitary roads (which have been rare), for all my life I have been leading a child by the hand.' Even so, Vera Suvchinsky was shocked by the squalor of the flat and person of Tsvetayeva, failed supermum. Such strategic choices are probably better appreciated today.

Tsvetayeva found the 'sugar' for her 'thirsty spirit' in a series of passionate relationships: 'It did not matter that those she loved should share her emotion; all that mattered was that Marina could feel strongly.' Back in the Bohemian *ancien régime* she and Osip Mandelstam enjoyed a narcissistic fling, but he escaped from the 'mist-wreathed nun'

Two poems by Blake Morrison

Prosperpina in the oilfields

I was all right that week in Aberdeen
Until the Shell girl brought the tea in
In a Clothkits dress, size 12 not 2,
But the same exactly as Josephine's,
A splaudy web of flowers, its pink-and-blue
Smoking out and thinning out my heart
Like a rubber glove left too near the gas-ring.

Each day in the abyss of a conference hall
Plundell talked of energy and sunrise,
How Britain — like a sleeper — had rolled over
To the East and this was where the wealth lay,
Though I knew from the Olympics of his chain-smoke
That the bottom had dropped out of the ocean
And the fire-breathing rigs would soon expire.

Then the softer touch, that's me, 'a word from
personnel'
Dispelling the myth of the boorish driller
Imprisoned in an underworld offshore,
My brief to the pedlars of real estate,
Burger bars, squash clubs and computers
To emphasise his half-year on the mainland
With endless time and money to burn.

Ham off the bone back in the dining-room,
Each sandstone slice collapsing like a cliff-edge,
And after the bar, and the rep I'd take up
To my bedroom, his beagle grunts a coming
Discreetly or never-quite-making-it,
My legs beyond waving like Jo with nanny
As I commute into the world of men.

Fitter

Measuring-tape, monkey-wrench, electric saw:
the fitter takes two sugars as before.
From the slack mouth of his canvas tool-bag
brass washers spew like winnings on the floor.

He moans how he's apprenticed for a pittance
because there's nothing else. *Given the chance*
I'd start a little business of mi own, like.
But to get the loan I need experience.

I stand like Millais' Christ among the sawdust
taking in his frets — *nice place you've got, must*
have cost a bit — his tongue's cerrated edge
Flipping between acceptance and mistrust.

Cigarette-end pizzling in the washbowl,
He tightens up his bit to drill a hole —
A bolthole through the newly fixed partition:
Still, mustn't grumble, three million on the dole.

Blake Morrison's new collection, The Ballad of the Yorkshire Ripper, *is published by Chatto this month.*

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before she devoured him. She could not help '*pulling* even a child *out of the cradle*' and the penlovers felt that pull. Alexander Bakhrakh complained that Tsvetayeva had 'imagined' him, but she could be bitterly realistic: 'I do not doubt that I shall be the most prominent woman in the senile memoirs of my young friends — but I never counted in the masculine present'. When the masculine present let Tsvetayeva down, she came up, pen in fist, fighting:

> How is your life? Are you fussing?
> flinching? How do you get up?
> The tax of deathless vulgarity
> can you cope with it, poor man?

Poor man indeed, that Prague Casanova who offloaded his thrillingly demanding Lilith for a wife with private means.

A Captive Lion is not one of those artisanal biographies where a given life is the hook for many incidental histories. It is what the publishers describe as a 'memoir of emotional sympathy' and that is probably the only way of dealing with Marina Tsvetayeva. Feinstein does not waste much time 'rehabilitating' her infuriatingly soulful subject, for whose tortured story a religious vocabulary often works best. Mediaeval hagiographers had to present their saints sins and all, and attest to their sanctity through resistance to temptation and the miracles. The biographer here is the hagiographer for a woman whose miracles were her poems — some of which Feinstein has also brought together in **Selected Poems of Marina Tsvetayeva** — and whose letters give away more proto-miracles. As for the sins, the only real mortler was a disappointing preference for a dull only son over a far more interesting, bafflingly forgiving daughter. Otherwise, the heroic Tsvetayeva deserves this life.

> Your souls at the post mortem
> will be like stuffed capons
> But I shall be there naked
> with only two wings for cover □

FIRST NOVELS

All the crazed

Richard Deveson

The Redemption of Elsdon Bird
NOEL VIRTUE *Peter Owen* £9.95
The Devil in the Dooryard
GREGORY BLAKE SMITH *Collins* £10.95
A Mirror for Princes
TOM DE HAAN *Cape* £10.95
The Dance of the Muses
HEATHER INGMAN *Peter Owen* £10.95
Utrillo's Mother
SARAH BAYLIS *Pandora* £9.95

THERE IS A SANE WAY of writing about insanity, and a not so sane way. Noel Virtue, to his credit, favours the sane way. **The Redemption of Elsdon Bird** is about a young New Zealand boy surrounded by people who are, in one way or another, off their heads. Elsdon's parents belong to an exclusive born-again sect called the Brethren; his Aunt Melva dies in Gothic squalor; Maurice, Elsdon's only friend, dispatches his brother and sister with a .303; an uncle hangs himself; and, after Elsdon's father has walked out, never to return, his mother sinks into terrifying, fatal derangement. Despite all this, Elsdon remains astonishingly spirited, curious, unselfconscious and, in the centre of himself, untouched. He's got no one to talk to except the radio announcers and Jesus, but his imagination — this is what we hope, anyway — will allow him to survive.

One of the strengths of this short novel is the vividness of the impression it creates, through the boy's eyes and with his simple, slangy sentences, of a dour and benighted New Zealand: shacks, stray cats, wilderness, the Mad Woman next door in her rugby jersey, illness, hidings, revival meetings, weather. Another is that it is about real life, in which love and fear exist and in which sanity is saner than insanity.

The vantage-point of **The Devil in the Dooryard** is, shall we say, more rocky. Scanning the blurb about Gregory Blake Smith it's hard to avoid snagging one's eyes on the dreaded phrase 'received an MFA in Creative Writing at Iowa'; difficult to avoid concluding that this biographical fact may help explain why his novel is so convoluted and artificial that we don't know how to take his crazy hero's craziness. John Wheelwright is a Boston Brahmin who's been obsessed since his teens with the figure of Samuel Mavericke, an early white settler who lived on an island in Boston Harbor. Wheelwright wants to build a replica of Mavericke's house on the island, settle there with his cousin-cum-wife Hetty and live a neo-Puritan life of 'light and election', uncontaminated by the American amorality across the water. But, besides having to deal with ghosts that pop up and the fact that Hetty (a sexual tease) is almost as crazy as he is, Wheelwright runs into trouble with an Indian who also lays claim to the island and all ends in disaster. There are also Iowa-burnished metaphors, pages of formidable but rebarbative 17th-century pastiche, learned disquisitions on Indian burial and the sexual-sacramental symbolism of the mortise and tenon joint. Are we being told that the American dream is actually an obsessional, puritanical fantasy of power and order? It's impossible to say, because all we can go on is Wheelwright's own account, sealed off in its madness.

Reyhnard Rorhah is also confused: 'My father was the greatest being in the whole world. He was really Adonac, or Adonac was really him — at any rate they were identical. Therefore Adonac's wife was my father's wife, and the Queen of Hulsitoq was the Queen of Brychmachrye. Obviously Asdura was my mother. Who else could be?' Well, not Madeleine, who is Reyhnard's sister, and his mistress; nor Beulah, who is his wife, and everyone else's mistress. How different are the brutal palace of Tsvingtori and the idyll-island of Ksaned Kaled from the home life of our own dear Queen . . .

'Tom de Haan', the pseudonymous begetter of this mythical world of Tsyraecs and Fahlraecs, is 23 years old. It's remarkable that he should have written so colossal and confident a book, which reads with the frictionless anti-logic of a waking dream. It's also *slightly* remarkable that he should have wanted to. Only occasionally do the characters in **A Mirror for Princes** seem to be made of flesh and blood. If the novel has a theme, it's that of kingship, which is hardly an idea whose hour has just struck. The whole thing is like an early clock, all ratchet-wheels and inlaid pearl and signs of the zodiac — but do the hands work? They certainly tell a very odd time.

The Dance of the Muses is a fictionalised autobiography of the French poet Ronsard, reconstructed with much honey, candle-smoke and evanescence of roses, though some academic steel girders are also left showing ('when I look back, this was as much a period of role playing as any other'). Oddly, Heather Ingman's thesis, that the poet's personal identity vanishes into his poetry, is rather belied by her novel, which is a very recognisable portrait of a sensual, wordly, selfish but substantial man.

Sarah Baylis' title is ironic. Suzanne (Clémentine) Valadon is indeed generally remembered as **Utrillo's Mother**, but here she tells her own story in order to reclaim herself, with a mixture of seriousness and mischief-making, both as a painter of importance in her own right and as a figure around which a late-20th-century writer can self-consciously weave, and then unpick, a feminist myth. It's an ambitious book, very brilliantly written and, as befits a novel about painting, particularly strong on visual description — the deep sleep of the French countryside, the dazzle and *boue* (though sometimes also the nostalgia-bedazzled *boue*) of Paris. As *NS* readers will know, Sarah Baylis died last month in an accident: an event made even more distressing by the fact that her novel is so brimming with life. □

SHORT STORIES

Shavings and splinters

Sabine Durrant

Collected Short Stories
KINGSLEY AMIS *Hutchinson* £11.95
Out of India
RUTH PRAWER JHABVALA *John Murray* £10.95
The Stories of Muriel Spark
MURIEL SPARK *Bodley Head* £12.95
Sugar and Other Stories
A. S. BYATT *Chatto* £10.95

AT TIMES the short story is a carefully constructed whole, a poem in prose or an intricate interplay between the narrator and the reader; at others it is the vehicle for tentative ideas, a training ground for subjects which might prove worthy of a novel. Kingsley Amis' **Collected Short Stories**, described in his preface as 'chips from a novelist's work-bench', contains the latter.

It is an interesting and entertaining, if not unfamiliar, collection. The stories, spanning 1955 to 1972, show Amis exploring the literary potential of ridiculous situations and imagining, with an edge of voyeurism, the consequences of grotesque events. Most enjoyable are those infused with his bar-stool wit. In 'Dear Illusion', a confessedly mediocre poet dedicates his last volume of poetry, 'Off', to all those who have encouraged him to continue in his work. In 'The Darkwater Hall Mystery' Watson, in Holmes' absence, misses clues as obvious as his inflated ego and sheepishly

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admits going to bed with a key witness.

Amis' short stories are, as he admits, 'telescoped' versions of his novels, with the same style and the same use of a generally reliable, humorous narrator. Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's method in **Out of India** is altogether different. Like James Joyce in *Dubliners* she uses the short story as a means of manipulating painfully inadequate narrators. They may not, like Joyce's, be caught 'sprawling on a pin', but their simple accounts are undercut by sometimes gentle, occasionally cruel, often bitter irony.

Here, love, sex and passion are catalysts for wider themes of human needs and desires. Relationships, often between 'unsuitable' couples; a childless widow's alternating infatuation for a child/man god and an adolescent boy; an old Indian woman's love and pity for an ageing and bigoted Dutch man: all spill over with self-delusion.

Most poignant of all is 'Passion' where a young girl sacrifices her European friends and habits for Real India in the shape of a poor, married library student. The bitter sting comes in the reader's recognition that, while she is heady with idealism, his attraction to her is based on arrogance. The reality of their passion is no more substantial than the meagre rice diet she adopts to try and make him stay with her.

If Prawer Jhabvala's protagonists, absorbed in feeling, lose sight of truth, the central characters in **The Stories of Muriel Spark** are coldly and scientifically detached. The stories are knife sharp, disturbingly ambiguous and brilliantly clever, moving from the constrained violence of pre-war Africa, via polished parquet and persecution in a Twenties drawing-room, to strange family goings on in contemporary Essex.

Spark uses a cool, dispassionate first-person narrator to prise open the shortcomings of others. In 'The First Year of My Life' a scowling war baby with ESP sees through the cooing faces of its elders, frantically trying to coax a smile, to the atrocities of the trenches and the battlefields beyond. Equally disquieting is 'Bang-Bang You're Dead', in which Sybil, with a gushing group of friends and strangers, watches an 18-year-old film of her youth in Africa. The film shows bright, carefree snippets from the lives of Sybil and Desirée, a girl with whom she shared an uncanny resemblance, but the viewers' sugary comments — 'What fantastic colours . . . Passion juice — how killing' — are interspersed with Sybil's memories of violence, of murder. While the guests' responses are comically and ironically inadequate, the cold, intellectual pleasure with which Sybil studies patterns in her grim past is even more disturbing.

Each of Spark's stories has this sense of tight pattern, of artistic integrity and unity. The girl nicknamed Needle, after finding a needle in a haystack, has a sharp eye and cutting tongue and 'threads' her way through the crowds in the Portobello Road. There is a haunting, unpleasant circularity to 'The Fathers' Daughters' in which two women find suitors in the disciples of their fathers: fading great writers.

Sugar and Other Stories is different from the above collections in that everything in it is published for the first time. It differs, too, by being much more personal. In 'The Next Room' a woman, alone for the first time after the death of her mother, contemplates the 'jigsaw' of forms and images, real and mythical, which make up one's idea of a person. Her mother she sees dressed 'like all mothers' in embarrassing and strident hats, frozen in the playroom doorway, crying out against powder paint on the carpet, or in the kitchen with a wooden spoon, dripping cochineal into birthday icing. Contemplative and absorbing, the book itself is like a 'jigsaw' or 'kaleidoscope', full of shifting colours and shapes. Images and ideas are linked by association; memory, myth and metaphor are interwoven. The least successful stories are too long and lack impetus, the best are fascinating explorations into the process of creation. □

CIVIL LIBERTIES

Whisper who dares

Brian Raymond

Official Secrets
DAVID HOOPER *Secker* £12.95

THE OFFICIAL SECRETS ACT is the reprobate uncle of British political life. Conceived with deliberate deceit in mind and delivered as an 'anti-spy' measure by a disingenuous Parliament in 1911, by the 1930s it had developed into its now familiar adult form as the bodyguard of that most cherished of all government prerogatives: the power to lie to the people and get away with it. Since then it has nimbly resisted all attempts at reform, shrugging off committees, reports and manifesto pledges by the dozen. Indeed, some of those who proclaim loudest their intention to take the old bugger firmly in hand, as soon as they have the power to do so, become fond and indulgent custodians in practice. Remember, if you can bear to, which administration began the ABC prosecution in February 1979.

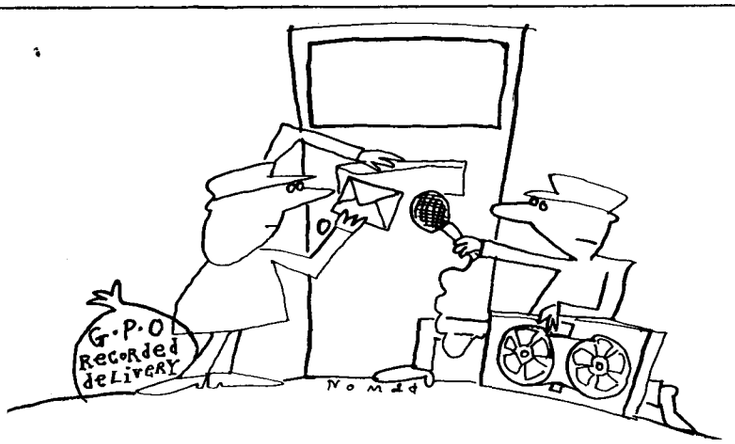
Today, its malign influence is as powerful as at any time in its 76-year life. Civil servants hoard innocuous facts with the perverted greed of misers, while Ministers of the Crown cheerfully leak (sorry, 'brief') to their journalist cronies in the Gay Hussar and the Interlude de Tabaillau. Anyone who doesn't play the game is sat upon hard, particularly if, like Sarah Tisdall, they are without political support. If, on the other hand, like Cathy Massiter, they look as though they wouldn't go meekly to gaol and might be able to put together a cogent and powerful defence, well then it isn't in the public interest to prosecute, is it?

The cult of secrecy and it attendant hypocrisy and double-standards are such essential and distinctive components of our political system that a detailed analysis of its origins and development would tell us a great deal about the sub-text of British politics this century. Anyone turning to David Hooper's book, however, in the hope of finding such an analysis, or any analysis at all, will be disappointed.

Hooper treats the OSA as though it were an agreeably eccentric and amusing aspect of public life, like the Sunday trading laws or steam railway accidents. The Victorian creation of a powerful and centralised bureaucratic machine, whose personnel had to be controlled by more than just the threat of loss of employment, receives no mention at all. The 'state of seige' atmosphere in which the Act was passed, and some of the more absurd cases prosecuted, are caricatured — 'every dachshund was viewed as a potential spy' — when they cry out for a discussion of the crucial interrelation between perceived external threats to national security and levels of internal repression which are thereby justified.

Perhaps the most notable absentee from this text is any mention of the growth of the concept of civil liberties, which is roughly of the same vintage as the OSA. Keir Hardie and the other nine immortal souls who alone voted against the Act in 1911 would not have recognised the idea of civil liberties as distinct from the rights and freedoms to be won in the class struggle, whereas the condemnation of Section 2 by today's politicians, of every hue, demonstrates just how universal the concept has become. Hooper ignores these interesting tangents, however, and keeps his nose close to the trough of purely factual information, the accumulation of which is the book's only real value. There is, of course, amusement to be had from the absurdities of past cases — Compton McKenzie was once accused of compromising the future usefulness of an agent who turned out to be dead — but it is difficult for those of us who actually defend in OSA cases to see the funny side of the Special Branch ransacking Duncan Campbell's home, or the offices of this magazine, for example. Until the old reprobate finally bites the dust, the fight is for real. □

Brian Raymond represented Clive Ponting in 1985 and is currently acting for Duncan Campbell and the NS *over Zircon.*



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Child sexual abuse

Carol-Ann Hooper, LSE, London WC2

Jean Seaton (*NS* 1 May) is right to point out that the issues raised by the recognition of child sexual abuse are complex and not to be resolved by Esther Rantzen-style child-saving, nor by simple formula solutions. Her article, however, perpetuates some dangerous myths.

First, that the evidence of sexually abused children is 'notoriously unreliable'. The DHSS explicitly counters the idea that children lie about sexual abuse in its 1986 guidelines. Workers in this field know that children are far more likely to retract true stories than to make up false ones. While the law still regards children as unreliable witnesses (and therefore offers little protection), psychologists' studies are producing mounting evidence to show that, questioned by properly trained interviewers, even very young children are far more accurate and less suggestible in their accounts of traumatic events than previously assumed.

Second, she writes that 'mothers are almost always as locked into the arrangement as the fathers who commit the physical act', and therefore equally responsible. Unless you regard leaving fathers alone with their daughters and expecting them to behave like responsible adults as a collusive act, there is little evidence for the active participation of mothers. Father-daughter incest is commonly committed in secret, extensively planned and the child threatened with harm, either to herself or her mother, if she tells. The mother's 'role' is usually to be out, at work, in hospital or elsewhere. She may not find out for many years that her child is being sexually abused. When she does, she is expected to make a choice between husband and child and may in the end lose both — is it any wonder that some women are immobilised by such a situation? After all, many social workers, faced with a suspected case of sexual abuse, are unsure of the correct action to take, and they have far less to lose. Many mothers do take action to stop the abuse; those who are unable to do so, however, should not thereby be treated as co-perpetrators.

It is reminiscent of all the old myths about rapists, 'provoked' into uncontrollable action, that male abusers are not to be held responsible for their own actions but rather to palm it off on their wives. Child sexual abuse is not committed by families (although a great deal of it is committed *in* families). It is almost exclusively (90-95 per cent) committed by men, many of whom also abuse other members of the family, including their wives. The point is not to 'invent' patriarchal monsters, but to face the reality.

Finally, there are studies which do not suffer from the weaknesses of the Childline survey and which offer clear evidence of how widespread a problem child sexual abuse is. While panic may not do much to help the children suffering from sexual abuse, opening the way for renewed denial by suggesting the need is a 'miasma' is surely not the way forward either.

Distressing tactics

Margaret Roberts, Calver, Sheffield

Expecting a summons for non-payment of fines totalling £100 after a 'Snowball' fence-cutting action, I was surprised to be visited by two police officers with a 'distress warrant' enabling them to enter the house — forcibly if necessary — and take goods to the value of £100. After much discussion, I reluctantly paid the fine. Being elderly, I did not want the matter taken further. The police were most apologetic, and one said that in 25 years of service he had never been asked to carry out this unpleasant duty.

I am not disputing the legality of this procedure, but it does raise certain questions. If police, not bailiffs, are going to be used in this way, their relations with the community are going to be soured not improved. It may be acceptable that a bailiff — *not* the police — should be sent to seize possessions if the person concerned has, for example, incurred large debts. For a comparatively small fine — not a debt — I think the practice, if it becomes widespread, would be unacceptable.

It is commendable that courts should look for alternatives to prison sentences, but this particular tactic is unjust in that it prevents a person appearing in court and denies them the chance (apparently it is not a *right*) to explain why their fine is unpaid. If the desire is to keep people out of prison, many anti-nuclear protestors would gladly pay their fines into the NHS if they were given the choice.

Build Jerusalem

H.C.S. Ferguson, FRIBA, Glasgow

I read with interest Jules Lubbock's essay on classical architecture (*NS* 1 May), which argued that it must be dismissed as a viable option as 'its associations with Nazism make it eternally unacceptable'. But surely the English Georgian style and its modern neo-Georgian derivatives have no associations with the Nazis whatsoever, being a national English style? Likewise, can there be any objection to a further revival of English Greek Revival style which pre-dated the Nazis by a hundred-odd years?

I am confused by the fact that classic-style architecture of a totalitarian character, almost fascist in image, continued to appear in the Soviet Union after World War 2, and still does. Clearly the association with Nazism has not deterred the Soviet authorities from using classical styles, notwithstanding that they were totally committed enemies of all things Nazi. Should we in Britain feel inhibited from employing the traditional national styles patterned on Georgian or English neo-classical? Or should we give encouragement to Mr Quinlan Terry and others, who do no harm and contribute interestingly to the landscape and townscape scene? They could be considered as working on in an extension of The Picturesque, England's greatest contribution to European art. As far as I known The Picturesque has no Nazi associations, but I await correction. No doubt Jules Lubbock will tell me where I have gone wrong in my argument.

J. G. Owen, Caerphilly

As any engineer or architect knows, the secret of success is attention to detail. Jules Lubbock is guilty of not doing so. The round arch, as used by the Romans, is an easy, cost-effective way of spanning a gap using simple materials and a relatively unskilled workforce. The round arch was not necessarily a triumphal Arch — the use of the round arch to build an aqueduct at the Pont du Gard was a masterpiece of engineering that owed nothing in its form to the Imperial

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message. Apart from a very expensive embankment no other method was technically possible.

Renaissance Europe's use of the round arch was practical, not ideological. Was the railway engineer who used the round arch in building a 19th century viaduct being Roman Imperialist? Jules Lubbock is simply wrong.

Eleni Cubitt, London N1

After a lapse of three years I decided to subscribe to the *New Statesman* again. I was richly rewarded. The first article I read was by Jules Lubbock (*NS* 24 April). This brilliantly written and well-informed piece not only seriously reports on the plans for a major new, national building, but it raises questions (surely the function of all serious journalism) in a robust and honest way.

The kind of questions which Jules Lubbock asks should form the basis for a continuous, public debate on arts patronage. The arts are vital to our lives and to our children's lives. As tax-payers we are, in a way, all of us patrons. Therefore we are entitled to discuss more often and openly who, when and how should finance important cultural events and buildings, and this is in no way disrespectful to the contribution of the Sainsbury family. Otherwise we shall end up with sorry tales like the Berenson-Duveen pact. It was after all to please Duveen that the disastrous cleaning of the Elgin Marbles took place which damaged the Marbles and destroyed the career of so brilliant a man as Roger Hinks.

Addicts' Index

Dr Ann Dally, London W1

As a doctor who has used the Home Office Addicts' Index many times, I agree with Ian Williams's comments (*NS* 17 April). The Index used to work fairly efficiently and was useful to doctors, even though its existence deterred some addicts from seeking medical help. Since little or no help was available to them, this probably did not matter very much, but the existence of Aids and its spread by addicts is making some people think again.

The fear of 'being registered' is based largely on myth, even though nurses, doctors' secretaries and even social workers can sometimes get the information. (It is difficult to see how hospitals and medical practices could be run or reports on patients written if this information was a secret confined to doctors). Many addicts and others believe that the names on the Index are available to the police or to foreign embassies, which they are not. 'Registration' is extremely unlikely to result in what many addicts believe are likely consequences — 'a knock on the door in the night', or a ban on foreign travel. As far as I know nothing is ever done officially to dispel these myths, or to encourage addicts to come forward or doctors to notify them. It is organised ambivalently, as though the authorities really hope that notification will not occur. Unlike other notifications (measles, TB, birth and death and so on), there is not even a small fee for notifying addicts.

The Index declined in efficiency with the increase in the number of addicts in the early '80s. It became even less useful when it was computerised a few years ago and does not yet seem to be able to cope with this. It has given me misleading information so many times that I no longer trust it without other evidence. For instance a common report is 'Not Known to the Home Office' on an addict who turns out to have had a dozen or more 'official' treatments.

The purpose of the Index is also statistical and here it does have some value, which could be increased. At present the method of collecting the statistics is haphazard. Doctors are supposed to notify all patients whom they suspect might be addicted, yet most doctors seem not to know this. If they notify at all, they tend to do so only for those addicts for whom they prescribe. Some do not notify at all, either on principle or because they do not wish to acknowledge the existence of so many addicts.

Most addicts eschew the medical services available to them, regarding them as not user-friendly. But although the Index contains (by Home Office reckoning) only about one in five of all addicts, and some would say far fewer, it does have statistical value, especially if combined with other information. For instance, at a time when politicians and the medical profession were patting themselves on the back for having overcome the problems of addiction, the Index showed an ominously steady rise, year by year, in the notifications of 'new' addicts until it finally became clear that there was an epidemic. It also gives the authorities the appearance of control, which is important in the present hysterical climate. Paradoxically, it also provides the press with regular figures with which to feed the hysteria.

With more efficient use of the computer and more thought into the exact value of the Index, it could still play a useful part. Without those things, it is misleading and potentially dangerous.

Wrong on electoral reform

Peter Jenkins, The Independent, *London EC1*

Danny Finkelstein misrepresents my position (*NS* 8 May). He brackets me with Neville Sandelson who is, or was, a politician. Mr Sandelson is urging the supporters of his own party, the SDP, to vote for Mrs Thatcher. I am not a politician and I am not urging anybody to do anything.

I have written nothing to suggest that supporters of the SDP/Liberal Alliance would not do well to vote for it. What I have argued in my column is that a realignment on the left at the expense of the Labour Party might be the more hastened by Labour suffering an

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overwhelming defeat than by the uncertainties of a hung Parliament. I have pointed out that the price of the former would very likely be another majority Conservative government while the price of the latter would almost certainly be Labour doing rather well. Danny Finkelstein tells your readers, in italics, that realignment is 'impossible without electoral reform.' I fear that he deludes himself if he thinks that a hung Parliament will result in electoral reform in a hurry.

Health divide

Margaret Whitehead, Whitchurch, Shropshire
As the author of the Health Education Council report *The Health Divide*, criticised in your columns (*NS* 3 April), I would like to reply to four points raised by John Rentoul's article.

1. Far from ignoring the considerable problems in following trends in health over time, I outline the very points made by Rentoul and caution readers to bear these and other points in mind when considering research in this field. But I then go on to discuss new studies which have tried to overcome these measurement problems. It is on the basis of such studies — which certainly do not use 'sloppy methods' — that I draw the conclusion that health inequalities between social groups have widened in recent decades.
2. The approach of Le Grand and Illsley cited by Rentoul unfortunately does not overcome any of the measurement problems of following the health of different *social groups* over time. As Le Grand points out, it addresses a completely different question, i.e. the variation in length of life of *individuals* in the population. But has the improvement in health been experienced equally across the population or have some social groups benefited more than others? Are some groups lagging behind? These questions cannot be answered by the Le Grand approach based on the measurement of individual variation.
3. It would be unfortunate if, following the *New Statesman* article, readers formed the impression that social inequalities in health are no longer important, or may not even exist. I would like to stress that there is an overwhelming body of evidence confirming that serious health inequalities have persisted into the 1980s, not only concerned with occupational class but also in terms of ethnic origin, gender, area of residence, employment status and housing tenure.
4. The evidence reviewed in *The Health Divide* does not in any way undermine support for the National Health Service. The enormous contribution the service has made to the health and welfare of the people of this country is apparent in so many aspects of life that its continued existence could be justified on any number of counts.

On the issue of social inequalities in health, however, its relevance is strictly limited *because many of the causes of such inequalities are outside its sphere of influence*, related as they are to aspects of poverty like poor living and working conditions, poor nutrition and to unhealthy life-styles in general. But there are important roles for the health service to play in this area — for example, modifying the health consequences of poverty and unemployment. Anyone interested in the role of health services in inequalities in health should read Blaxter's excellent discussion of the issue (*Soc. Sci. Med.* 17, 1983) and also see the Unemployment and Health Study Group's recommendations (Manchester University).

Fungus the bogeywoman

John Brosnan, Harrow, Middx.
Paul N. Wilson's attack on your critic Kim Newman's claim (*NS* 3 April) that horror fiction is 'speaking for and to the late 20th-century in a fashion of which mainstream fiction is proving itself incapable' isn't really fair, particularly as at least one of the 'mainstream' authors he cites in evidence against Newman *does* write horror fiction. I'm referring, of course, to Angela Carter. One could provide numerous examples to back Newman's claim, such as *The Fungus* by Harry Adam Knight. In it a misguided woman chemist unleashes a mutated fungus that very quickly covers most of Britain. The woman is obviously supposed to be Mrs Thatcher and the fungus is a metaphor for her corrosive monetarist policies. What mainstream writer could make the same point with such horrifying effectiveness?

Edward Sackville-West

Michael De-la-Noy, 52a Northumberland Place, London W2 5AS
I have been commissioned to write a biography of the novelist and critic Edward Sackville-West, who at one time reviewed for the *New Statesman*. If any of your readers have personal recollections of Sackville-West, or letters relating to him that I might copy and return, I would be most grateful if they would get in touch with me.

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WARM, INFORMAL Sussex woman — seeks affectionate, intelligent man, 34 +, similar interests gardening, crafts, good conversation, humour, books, music, NS interests. Photo appreciated. Box (20)4951. W20.24

WEST LONDON Scotsman, 33, unattached, graduate, small flat, large mortgage, ancient mini, seeks friendly lady. Likes: books, music, cinema, cats, food, countryside etc. Box (20)4935. W20.25

WOMAN, YOUTHFUL 49, seeks intelligent/warm/humorous/trustworthy/solvent man willing to share lifestyle, involving summer in Greece winter in Suffolk/London. Since divorce I have been happily independent but sharing is better. I have many interests and generally aware of current affairs. No chauvanists/husbands. Letter and photo please. Box (20)4953. W20.26

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SAT 23 MAY

ABORTION LAW REFORM ASSOCIATION: A Woman's Right to Choose Campaign is holding a Public Meeting & Political Forum on 'Choice in the Eighties' at 2 p.m. Mary Ward Club, Coram's Fields, Guilford St, London WC1 (2 mins Russell Sq. tube). Speakers include: Alison Frater Gen. Sec. Brook Advisory Centres, Jo Richardson MP — Labour Party, Sue Slipman — SDP/Liberal Alliance. Adm; (to cover room hire) £1.50 waged, 50p unwaged. Further info contact: ALRA, 88 Islington High St, London N1 8EG. Tel. 01-359 5200.

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BACKCHAT

OUT TO LUNCH

The know-all

Andrew Lumsden

AH WELL, the get-away-from-it-all flight to ancient Greece I was promising myself in this column last time never happened. Every charter was booked solid with British scientists who thought they might get better funding 2,500 years ago.

I shot Richard Branson's hot-air balloon with an air-gun, cornered him as he stood in the wreckage in a Green Belt pasture crawling with surveyors about to put up second homes for yuppies and demanded preferential treatment: 'I'm a refugee,' I said, 'Virgin has got to get me out.'

'Sorry, mate,' said Richard, 'there's a £1,000 fine at ancient Athens airport for every refugee who hasn't got proper papers, and *we* get to pay it.'

'I'm rubbish,' I cried, 'doesn't that appeal to you? Sweep me into the past!' Nothing doing.

'It's first come, first served on *my* airline,' said Richard kindly, 'give us a hand, there's a good chap. Here's some stupid bugger gone and brought me down to earth.'

Sadly I wandered away. I ought to be cheering up. My phone's been repaired (est. £17), my lost specs are being replaced (est. £65) and I've borrowed a watch in place of the one that stopped. But what am I to do for the next ten years? Ten years precisely, no more, no less. You see, I had my palm read some while ago. Like Tiresias, like Cassandra, I know nearly all that has ever happened and nearly all that ever will. *They* got the advance plot-lines of the Theban and Trojan soaps, I of my personal one.

Except there were two kickers. The gods never give but they cross their fingers behind their backs:

Kicker No 1: A career change is going to make me prosperous beyond my wildest dreams from 1997 onwards *but I'm not allowed to know anything of the years in between.*

Kicker No 2: To coincide with affluence I'm to have two love-affairs in quick succession in '97, of which the second will be the most important of my life — but, whoever it's to be, *I've already met him.*

Where did I get this guff, you ask? It was at a private function at the Dorchester Hotel for those Olympians of 1980s Britain, the City's whizz-kids, believe it or not. One of the rare breed of whizz-ladies had invited me and, in tribute to *her* eminence, I was seated to the right of our hostess, Lady M--, gardening wife to a leading mover and shaker of British companies.

I had my future told me as the meal limped tamely towards its conclusion: brandy, port, nectarines, hothouse grapes, Laphroaig, madeira, peaches, syllabubs, 84 varieties of cheese, Château d'Yquem, cigars, cigarillos, Balkan Sobranies and that liqueur made by nuns out of endangered species in Andorra, of which only two small bottles have ever been brought into England (the Duke of Edinburgh possesses the other) . . . I'm sorry, I'm getting carried away.

In short we'd reached the sweet course when Lady M--, dispelling the mist from before my eyes and letting me see that really she was Aphrodite or Hera, read my hand. My lips are sealed on everything after '97 (however, Martin Amis — relax). But in my euphoria I ignored her cunning aside that someone I've already met is to be or resume being my heart's desire ten years from now.

Who? Who? I now look at the teller in the bank, the news-vendor, even the Pembridge Rd pharmacist. Will it be Sir Keith Joseph, whom I once interviewed? In payment for knowing the future, Tiresias as I recall had to keep changing sex (as well as, like me, losing his specs). Cassandra — the reverse of Mrs Thatcher, but with equally disastrous results — was fated never to be believed. And I face ten years without a clue how I'm to become so wealthy by '97.

The present main men in my existence, Felix the Briton and Woodward the American, have held an anguished summit in San Francisco. 'Is it to be one of us, then,' they asked, staring at each other with appalled eyes, 'who's destined to care for the old brute in his dotage?' A hard fate. Perhaps they'll toss one another for it. □

FIRST PERSON

Never walk away

Martin H. Ryle

I WONDERED for a time whether I would have to write this piece with the major sporting question of 1986-87 — will Brighton and Hove Albion be relegated? — still unresolved. However, defeat at Hull City now makes relegation mathematically certain and I can look back with more than the usual early-May, pre-Cup Final nostalgia, saying goodbye not just to one more vanished season but to life in the upper reaches of the League. These days, what is more, I get an uneasy sense that it may be time to say goodbye to football in general, not so much because of the game's perennial financial crisis as because the good things about soccer, on and (especially) off the field, seem more and more outweighed by the bad.

Going to watch football is all about identification: with your home town and its team, with 'your' section of the crowd, with the game at large and its culture. After the Heysel riot, which displayed that culture's shameful side so blatantly, several friends who had been at least occasional watchers told me they doubted they would ever go to another match. Heysel continues to disturb me, too, even though my initial reaction was defiant: I felt, just as I've always felt about the racism that swirls about the terraces, that the violence and hate infesting soccer's margins need to be kept back. The 'vast majority of decent fans' needs to keep going along.

Never having been tempted by radical chic notions of football thugs as the shock troops of the revolution — notions recycled, in threadbare 'postmodernist' disguise, in Steve Redhead's new book *Sing When You're Winning* (Pluto, £5.95) — I am quite happy to count myself among that law-abiding majority. The only time I got caught up in any fighting (a few Sheffield United fans set on me after Brighton had beaten their team 1-0 at Bramall Lane, but I kept calm and some of their mates rescued me), the large, placid club official who used to supervise all the away trips rightly dubbed me 'one of the most mildest of our customers'. And 'mildness' — tolerance, irony, a camaraderie which builds on and transcends partisan loyalty to one's own team — is still there in football crowds, outside the gangs ('F Troop' and the rest) who make the headlines.

All the same, my unease about soccer culture's post-1985 values troubles the feeling of escape which is another delight of going to the match. Like any game, football can be intensely engaging to its addicts, even though we know it isn't *really* important. In this it contrasts with workaday life, which sometimes, especially on wet November Saturdays, seems all too important and all to engaging.

This sense of contrast and escape made my regular visits to the Goldstone Ground particularly welcome during the early 1980s when I was exhausted by anxiety about nuclear weapons and by the efforts I was putting into disarmament politics. Once the teams came out of the tunnel ('to be greeted by the roar of the crowd') I was back in an enchanted world of endlessly repeated excitements, pains and clichés, an unchanged source of pleasure since my thirteenth year. Football offered an escape from politics, too.

Which is not to say that I pretended there was no 'politics of football'. But other people could worry about that, I just wanted to watch Mark Lawrenson (yes, he played for Brighton then) set off on another upfield run. Now, though, the political dimension of football forces itself more, insistently on my mind and sometimes makes me want to vindicate the game by setting out a serious defence of its threatened positive values: it's a pity Steve Redhead's book, in what are certainly grim days for soccer, attempts nothing of the kind. At

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other times, I blame these complex post-Heysel thoughts for my impulse to stop going altogether. Or is this simply the intellectual's usual inclination to seek recondite causes for simple phenomena? Crowd violence is not a simple phenomenon, but my own relative loss of enthusiasm for football probably is: for its explanation, consult the wrong end of the Division II table. Whether or not better days dawn for the game as a whole, I may well be standing on the East Terrace again before long. If relegation comes, can promotion back be far behind? □

FIRST PERSON

Suffer little children

Bill Greenwell

THE PHONE RINGS at the day nursery to which my son goes each afternoon. It is a senior social worker and he wishes to speak to the supervisor.

'Good afternoon,' he says, gently. 'I'm afraid there's a problem about the nursery which I must come in to discuss with you. As you know, a member of my team called late this morning and she was anxious about the number of children in the care of you and your staff.

'But don't worry,' he continues. 'We really do recognise the pressure upon the nursery for places and we're not merely well aware of, but grateful for, the good work you do. I would be grateful, however, if I could discuss some way of reducing the numbers, but gradually, and in a way that won't cause any upset. It's a delicate and difficult issue for both yourself and the trustees. Nevertheless, I'm sure we can come up with something constructive.'

If only it had really happened like that.

The first social worker arrived at about half past eleven in the morning. She was doing a spot check. She looked round the Fountain Day Nursery, made notes, most of them mental, and beetled back to her Exeter office and to Mr Still, her superior. This gentleman, the various letters of the law stamped monotonously through him, picked his phone up double-pronto. He rang the supervisor briskly. He gave it to her straight from the Social Services shoulder (no space for crying upon). The Fountain Day Nursery, Grosvenor Place, Exeter, had too many children. It had more than 24. Moreover, the staff looked pretty young and inexperienced to his subordinate. If the number of children had not been reduced to 24 by the next morning the nursery would be closed down.

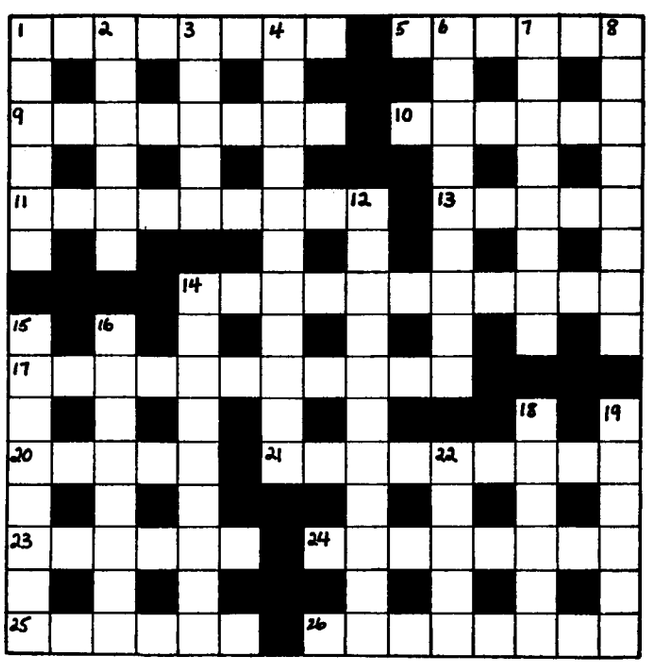
Now Mr Still rang the trustee and founder of the nursery. Under the 1948 Nursery and Playgroup Act, section 4, Mr Still informed the trustee, the trustees had committed criminal offences: for the first offence it was £50; thereafter £100 *and imprisonment*. Shaken, the trustee asked for time. There were children involved for whom sudden change would be distressing. Relationships would be broken. Not possible. No more than 24 children by next morning — or else.

It was therefore a distressing experience for parents like myself when, going to pick up our children at the end of the working day, we found an atmosphere of panic. In particular, it was distressing to find the supervisor and staff, with whom our children have made very loving relationships and in whom we had complete confidence, made to feel like criminals. That the nursery had breached the guidelines, there was no doubt (and no pretence of doubt). As the only open, all-day, all-the-year-round nursery in a city where there is practically *no* nursery education, the Fountain had gradually given way too far to the needs of desperate parents, many of them single. But it's all too easy to paint a grim, sub-Dickensian view of the scene — workhouse; children packed like pilchards; no room to swing a teddy-bear — when the truth is, bending the rules or not, the Fountain was a spacious, happy, pleasant place. For the woman driving 20 miles from Cullompton each day, there being no nearer facility, it had been the place where her child's speech difficulties had been helped. It was where my son's friends were, an essential and important part of every day. And it had also given my wife a chance to seek, and successfully to gain, a job.

Now, on a Wednesday evening, children were faced with the prospect of being separated both from friends and developing social relationships. Parents were being faced, instantly, with the likely prospect of losing jobs, of losing the opportunity to search for jobs, even of a business breaking

Weekend Crossword 1557

£3 Book Tokens for the first three correct solutions opened. Entries to Crossword 1557, New Statesman, Foundation House, Perseverance Works, 38 Kingsland Road, E2 8BA, by first post 22 May.



Name_____

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ACROSS

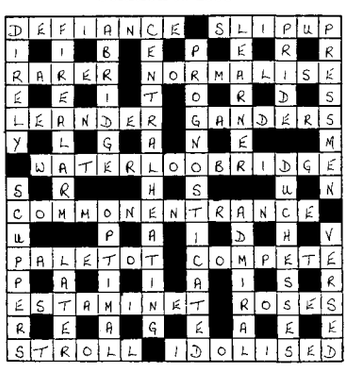
1. Shell gives vehicle a bit of speed (8)
5. Goes to bed with a bachelor in reverse manoeuvre (6)
9. Men lose love, gone astray and solitary (8)
10. Go slow worker? (6)
11. There would be reduced opportunity if there were no foreigner in the bus (9)
13. Time to join and become a poet's friend (5)
14. Shrub which provides shade in boat (11)
17. It is amazing that the less civilised are in existence (11)
20. Means of scoring in one of the main offices of state (5)
21. Some sing about the start of revolution being cutting (9)
23. Creature which is the opposite of a layer (6)
24. The left I criticise for free (8)
25. Touching friend of Christopher Robin (6)
26. Tiny page disguised as foreigner (8)

DOWN

1. Material found in the local I continued to patronise (6)
2. Railwaymen come up with a method which is also needed for planes (6)
3. Dish featured in article on history (5)
4. Give views about the role of class division? (11)
6. Missile which makes one roar with wild anger (9)
7. Piece of music for playing at centre (8)
8. Left a pig surrounded by its product (8)
12. Planning to make the opposition team use the bell (11)
14. Arrived carrying outmoded currency for garden equipment (4,5)
15. Is the worker after a decoration when showing respect? (8)
16. Write a poem about love now turning into fainting (8)
18. Something to eat, a number of which must be supplied for the battlefield (6)
19. Scattered so that a means of communication goes up in all directions (6)
22. Put a hundred on the pile and it is a bargain (5)

SETSQUARE

Solution to 1555



Prizewinners to 1555

H. M. Snowden (Bradford)
Peter J. Nichol (Portsmouth)
Tony Black (Harlow, Essex)

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down. Mr Still, arriving the next day, was confronted by a radio reporter. What did he propose those children over the permitted 24 should do? Rummaging a little desperately for a response, he came up with the statistic that there are 110 registered child-minders in Exeter.

In our family, we're not wild about child-minders; certainly we don't think it would suit our son. Besides, the nursery's much more than a place where working parents may safely leave their children. Private, registered as a charity, what it provides is the nursery education which relatives and friends in the north of England consider merely normal.

In the face, then, of the very varied provision of state support for the under-fives, in a county well down the league in this respect, I think it's time there was a great deal more discussion of the issues. There seem to me to be three simple prerequisites for such a discussion. The first is that different factions — the playgroups lobby, the nursery school lobby, the child-minder lobby, the workplace crèche lobby, the day-care nursery lobby — should forget their supposed differences and remember that parents have a right to choose. The second is that any system in which rules are inflexible in the face of something that *works* needs giving a good going-over. The third is that, if a social worker behaves like a traffic warden, he or she should get out on the beat and start banging stickers on windscreens instead. □

Weekend competition

No 2975 **Set by Tim Hopkins**

Enough of all this politics; it's time for some unadulterated Culture. Could we have any one of Shakespeare's plays re-written as a Shakespearean sonnet? By 27 May, please.

No 2972 **Set by Russell Lucas**

Advertisements for a General Secretary for the 'Save the Kinnock' campaign.

Report **By Rosie Hughes**

It really is *such* a shame about Neil. He never stops trying to be helpful — even giving that horrible Mrs Thatcher a hand over Zircon — and nobody ever appreciates it. Still, I'm sure it would moisten his eyes to know how very much *you* all care: we had simply bags of advertisements for a 'Save the Kinnock' General Secretary. Special Mentions to D.A. Prince and Pamela Jane Pooh; £10 a head to the writers of the ads below.

The successful candidate will be able to demonstrate good presentational skills, possibly acquired in a demanding sales environment such as the Saudi blow-heater market. He or she (but it will probably be a he, currently producing documentaries for Channel 4, living in a Georgian house in Bermondsey and with an elderly ex-miner father in a sheltered housing scheme in the Rhondda) will be expected to demonstrate a sound knowledge of the ideological base of the contemporary Labour Party: i.e. have read a short article by Gramsci, an interview with Eric Hobsbawm in *Marxism Today*, the first three pages of *In Place of Fear* and *The Ragged Trousered Philathropist*. Ability to understand marketing strategy and building a successful product image are far more important than commitment to outmoded class analysis. If you think cloth caps are naff we want to hear from you.

NICHOLAS MURRAY

Britain's best-loved political animal is faced with extinction. A cross between a balding koala bear and a chameleon, the male Kinnock will snuggle endearingly up to any voter, changing colour protectively the while. (This characteristic is not shared by the female.) It lives on Greens, which provide it with ideas and essential roughage, but it is running desperately short of this foodstuff through over-grazing. Consequently, its energy is waning and a fatal anaemia is setting in.

The Kinnock's present grazing grounds are badly infested with loon and doubt-wort and need total clearance and re-seeding. Meanwhile, the surviving animals must be maintained in a hazard-free environment, with good public viewing facilities. As a living example of outmoded class politics, this creature is of immense historic interest.

The post demands tenacity, vision and immunity to boredom. Salary £7,500 p.a. Bicycle allowance.

ALISON PRINCE

Applications are not only sought but sincerely — sincerely — invited, and with all the hurry and haste appropriate to the role of rejuvenating the red rose. And this advert asks you, addresses itself to you, even, if it might be allowed, admonishes you that it will be your job, your task, your role, your duty daily to defend the Labour leader's unswerving addiction to such rhetorical flourish as bathed Bevan in blinding brilliance . But — and let's be frank, be honest, let's not waste time beating about the political gooseberry bush for babies the Tories tossed out with the dirty bathwater — applicants will need to start campaigns, to hire hustings, to beat the ballot-box, raising Cain and cash alike to pay the orators — the *real* orators — to assuage the contagion of that rhetoric, to resist — and, if you don't think it's possible, don't apply — the unacceptable farce of Thatcher's cruel capitalism. Send SAEs.

WILL BELLENGER

Benjamin Franklin said nothing was certain in this world, except death and taxes.

Pessimists have added a third certainty. Neil Kinnock failing to get to Number Ten.

Have you the qualities to prove them wrong? We're looking for a General Secretary who can overcome all opponents (including those outside the Labour Party). Dismiss all opinion polls. Believe in the product. Above all, what the Kinnock Disaster Fund needs is someone who prefers outsiders to odds-on favourites.

This is a non-sexist, non-agist, non-political post. (But no blacks.)

NAOMI MARKS

A challenging opportunity has arisen to spearhead the drive to save the Kinnock. This former lord of the jungle has been hunted to near-extinction, but a more insidious threat to its survival is the growing seepage of SDP into the environment. Originally synthesised from organic wastes, this man-made compound has become alarmingly popular among the affluent middle classes. Formerly regarded as harmless, it is now thought to be toxic to the Kinnock, which sheds its hair and emits distressed, repetitive cries.

A General Secretary is required to co-ordinate the efforts of voluntary groups such as trade unions, feminists, militants, black sectionaries, activists, pacifists, trotskyites, gays, fabians etc. Minimum three 'O' levels; a Nobel Peace Prize would be an advantage.

NOEL PETTY

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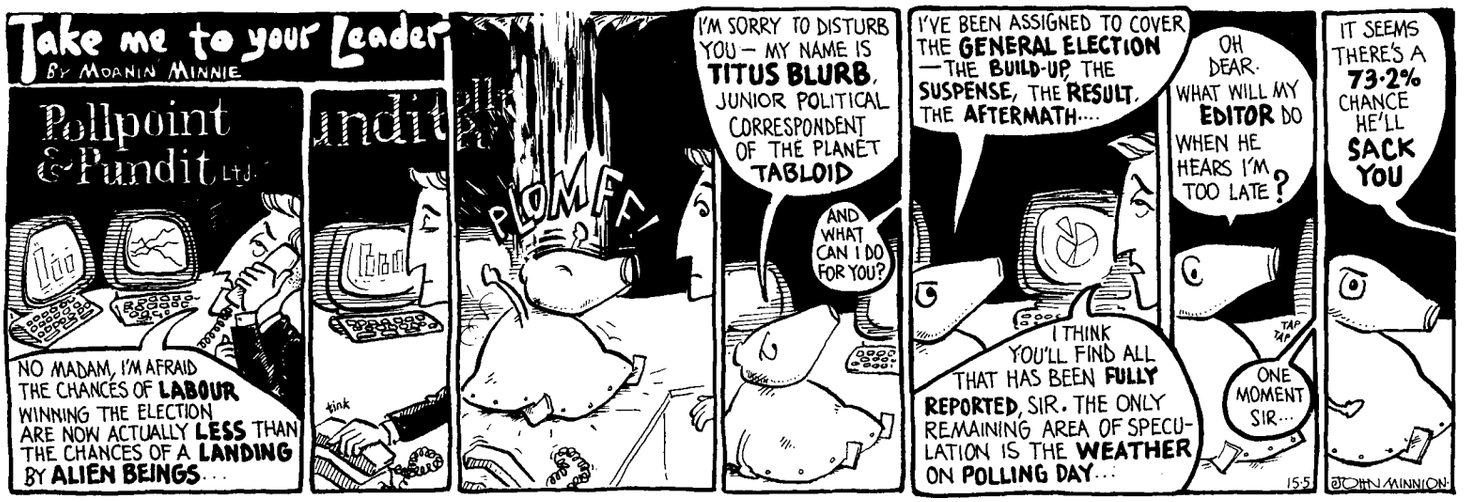
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Chess

LOOKING FORWARD to forthcoming events in Britain, one that may attract fast movers with a thirst is the Joshua Tetley British Open Quickplay in Leeds on 30-31 May, for which the sponsors are offering the inducement of a 'one pint voucher redeemable at selected Leeds pubs' to all adult competitors. In spite of those who will only be there for the beer, it should be quite a strong event — 3 GMs competed last year when Nigel Short whitewashed the field 11-0. Contact Leeds Leisure Services (0532-462816) for further details.

To move from beer to fags — or rather, enforced abstinence from them — the entry form for this year's British Championships (to be held 3-15 August in the Swansea Leisure Centre) quietly announces an important innovation: 'Smoking will be banned in the playing hall at all times'. I have heard desperate protests that this is contrary to FIDE regulations, but not so. The laws governing playing conditions are only explicit about spectators being prohibited from smoking. That's not the same thing as requiring that players be permitted to do it. Remember the story about Botvinnik getting Ragozin to chain-smoke at him in training? Now it's the smokers who have to acclimatise. As a repentant ex-smoker, I hope the BCF will also blow away any whiff of tobacco sponsorship. For where are all the smoke-filled chess clubs and cafés of my youth? Let's not pretend we don't know. The regulars got buried a little early.

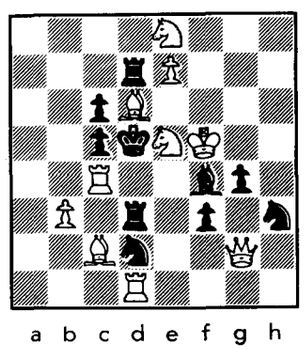
Winning the British championship carries with it the privilege of a match against the US champion. Currently that's Yasser Seirawan, who showed good form on his way to winning this year's Lugano Open:

Seirawan-Simic, Lugano Open 1987. Grünfeld.

1. d4 Nf6 2. c4 g6 3. f3!? A rare anti-Grünfeld line that scores well when played. Its main practical disadvantage is that it rules out the most aggressive anti-Benoni systems if Black now goes in for 3 . . . c5. **d5 4. cxd5 Nxd5 5. e4 Nb6 6. Nc3 Bg7 7. Be3 0-0 8. f4 f5** Blocking and stabilizing the centre. It's more exciting to play 8 . . . Nc6, e.g. 9. d5 Na5 10. Bd4 Bg4 11. Qd3 e5 12. fxe5 Nac4 13. Qg3 Qg5 with great complications, as in Gheorghiu-Korchnoi, Zürich 1984. **9. Qb3 + Kh8** Up to now play has followed the decisive final game of the Speelman-Gavrikov match, London Docklands 1985. Gavrikov played 9 . . . e6 10. e5 Nc6 11. Nf3 a5 12. a3 Ne7. Although he lost in the end, it must surely be right to go for occupation of d5 with a Knight. **10. e5 c6 11. Nf3 Nd5 12. Nxd5 cxd5 13. Be2 Nc6 14. Kf2 e6 15. Rhc1 Rf7 16. Bd2** A strong manoeuvre: the idea is to exchange off the Nc6 and then play Bb4. **Rc7 17. Bb5 Bd7 18. Bxc6 Rxc6** Thinking: 'If he captures the b-pawn it's a draw by repetition.' **19. Qxb7! Rb8 20. Qxa7 Ra8 21. Qb7 Rb8** So it's a draw, then? **22. Qxc6! Bxc6 23. Rxc6 Rxb2 24. Rac1 Bf8 25. Rc8 Qe7 26. R1c7 Rxd2 +** Black has to try this since 26 . . . Qb4/a3 27. Rf7 wins very easily for White. **27. Kg3! Qxc7 28. Rxc7 Rxa2** Although material is equal for the moment, Black's weak pawns combined with the White Rook's control of the 7th rank mean that the game is effectively over. **29. Ng5 h6 30. Nxe6 Bb4 31. Rd7 Ra6 32. Nc7 Ra3 + 33. Kf2 Ra2 + 34. Kf1 Ra1 + 35. Ke2 Ra2 + 36. Kd3 Ra3 + 37. Kc2 Rc3 + 38. Kb2 Rc4 39. Rd8 + Kg7 40. Rd7 + Kh8 41. Ne8 Kg8 42. Nf6 + Kf8 43. e6 Rxd4 44. Rf7 mate 1-0.**

Now, as promised, back to the *Lloyds Bank British Chess Problem Solving Championship 1987* — and this time (fingers crossed!) I've got the diagram right. In our 17 April issue I left out the Black King. Well, there he is, in the thick of it on d5, and the task is to mate him in 2 moves. To enter, send the *key* (White's first move) to Sponsorship Section CCD, Lloyds Bank plc, Princess House, 152/156 Upper Thames Street, London EC4R 3UJ. Entries must be in by 1 July and please mark your allegiance by inscribing '*New Statesman*' on them. I would advise enclosing an SAE too. That is not a condition of entry, but otherwise you won't be told what the move should have been if you get it wrong.

Those who get it right qualify to compete in a more difficult postal phase. The top scorers will be invited to the finals in London in January 1988. And the eventual winner and runner-up will be invited to represent Britain in the 1988 World Problem Solving Championship. Overseas subscribers are also welcome to enter. For them there is a special prize of £50 that will be awarded to the highest scorer who would have taken part in the final if resident in the UK.



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This England

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☐ Another source of 'new talent' has been Post Office workers. Both MI5 and MI6 have always gone in for steaming open letters and it is extraordinary how much high-grade material even now can be obtained by this old-fashioned method. — *Daily Telegraph* (G. Heathcote)

☐ 'Everybody knew Peter Wright,' he said yesterday. 'He was a member of the Oxford and Cambridge Club.' — *The Times* (Robert Leslie)

☐ A British scientist has been honoured by the EEC for research work showing that cows give more milk and pigs produce larger litters if they are touched, stroked, patted and talked to in an inane but friendly way. Pigs are better behaved if they listen to 'bland' music such as that on BBC Radio 2. — *The Times* (Dave Green)

☐ It is not known whether Oldfield took the 'full-life' test, in which questions about homosexuality are asked, or the shorter 'counter-intelligence' version, which asks such questions as 'Are you working for a foreign power?' — *Observer* (Derek Morgan)

☐ Second class is to disappear from British Rail travel with the introduction of the new timetable next month. The term 'Standard' will be used instead. — *Railnews* (John Gowing)

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